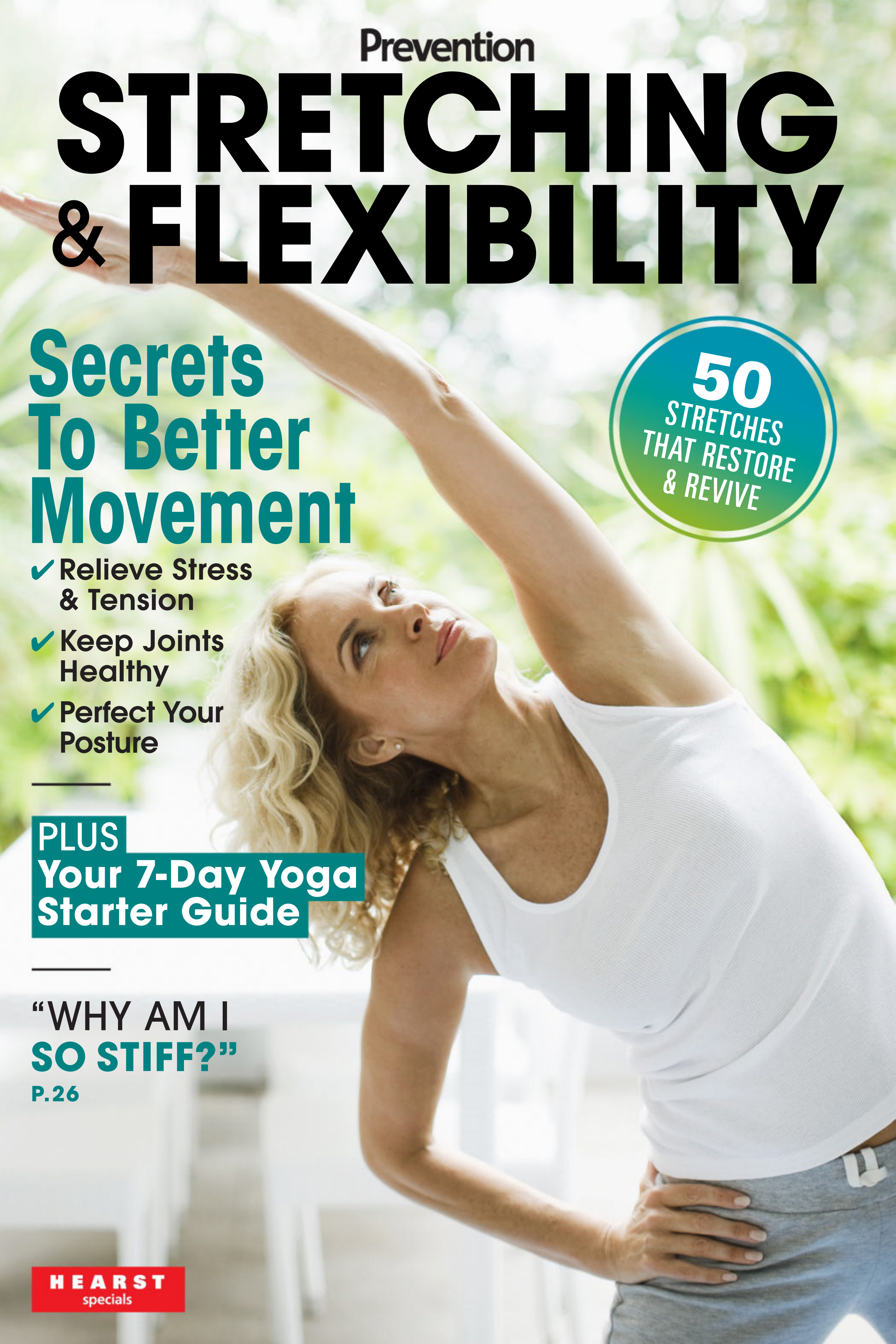

Prevention

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Secrets To Better Movement

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- ✓ Keep Joints Healthy
- ✓ Perfect Your Posture

50 STRETCHES THAT RESTORE & REVIVE

PLUS
Your 7-Day Yoga Starter Guide

“WHY AM I SO STIFF?”
P.26

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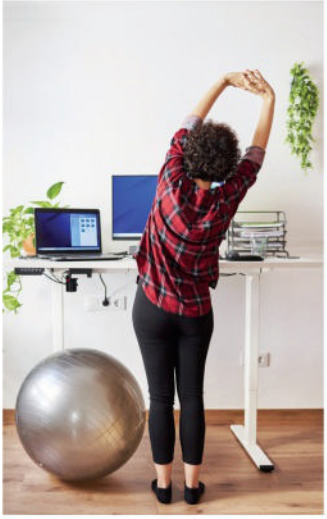


PART 1

Why is Flexibility so Important?

06 Feel Lighter and Looser
If every muscle feels stiff, it's probably doing your body a great disservice.

16 Stretch Your Way Happier & Healthier
It's never too late to become more supple.

PART 2

Why am I so Stiff?

28 The Secret to Better Movement
What exactly is fascia, and how does it impact your body?

32 The Science of Joint Health
Think of this as an owner's guide to your joints.

48 Are You Sitting Too Much?
Sitting all day negatively impacts your body.

PART 3

How Do I Start a Yoga Practice?

56 Find the Right Style for You
How to choose a class that suits your personal goals and mood.

62 Your 7-Day Yoga Starter Guide
Do just one move every day for a week, and you'll be hooked on how great you feel.

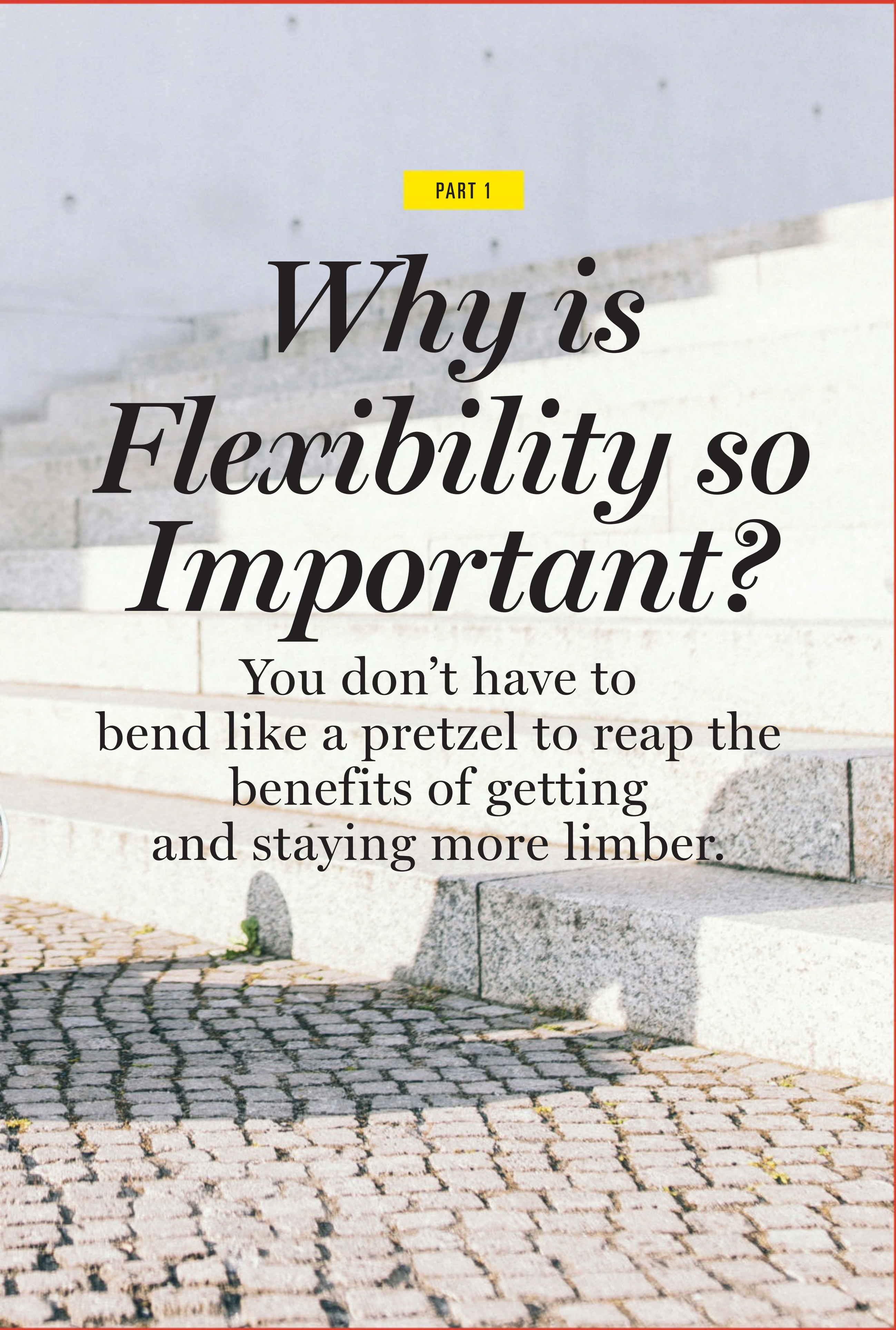
68 Strong Mind, Strong Body
How a calming practice like gentle yoga can change your entire body.

PART 4

Which Other Stretching Workouts Can I Try?

78 Easygoing Stretches for Slow-Moving Days
You can still squeeze in an effective routine even when you don't even want to get out of bed.

88 Roll With It
Using a foam roller before stretching is a powerful combination.



PART 1

Why is Flexibility so Important?

You don’t have to bend like a pretzel to reap the benefits of getting and staying more limber.

FEEL LIGHTER AND LOOSER

If stress or inactivity makes every muscle feel like it's stuck in a vice, it's probably doing your body a great disservice. Here's why sometimes you need to give your body (and mind) a rest.

BY SAM RIDER

Visit physical therapist Freddie Murray at his London private clinic, and you'll find a man with drooping shoulders and crossed legs, slouching forward as he quizzes his clients, trying to get to the bottom of the aches, pains, and injuries they might be suffering from. It's surprising—there are few people you'd expect to personify perfect posture more than a man who works with elite athletes and celebrities. But this embodiment of relaxation is exactly what, according to Murray, you should be looking to emulate for most of your day.

"Muscles are like light switches—they should be either on or off—and neither state will cause the body problems," explains Murray. "But if they're constantly working in the background—like a dimmer switch—when you're essentially at rest, they'll quickly fatigue, leading to increased tension, muscle stiffness, and the sensation of pain." Indeed, experts now believe that walking around in a state of stress that means you're wound tighter than a jack-in-the-box, coupled with exercise routines that focus on activating and strengthening muscle groups, is giving rise to an increase in muscle injuries. Think of the condition known as bruxism: an unconscious clenching of the jaw muscles that can lead to chronic pain and tension headaches. Or creeping yet debilitating lower-back pain, tight shoulders, and a stiff neck that raise their ugly heads whenever you're under stress at work or home. If only you could flip the switch and turn them all off.

ALL WOUND UP

Musculoskeletal issues, including back pain, neck tightness, and upper-limb problems, are increasing in people of all ages as we spend more and more of our time seated or in front of a screen. The issue is that it seems easier to find a quick fix for our pain than tackle the root causes: a fixation on tensing and squeezing muscles and a high-stress existence. "But it's not a sin to relax, to slouch and release your stomach muscles," says Murray. Letting it occasionally all hang out, he insists, is actually normal and healthy, if only because it encourages the body to switch from the sympathetic nervous system (that which powers your fight-or-flight response) to the parasympathetic system, known to conserve energy, slow the heart rate, and relax your body.

It's much better to focus on using the muscles you actually need for movement, rather than over-recruiting all the time. For example, "a lot of people think they're using their deep core muscles correctly, but are in fact over-recruiting them," explains Lynne Robinson, founder of subscription channel and app Body Control Pilates. "To move well, you need muscles working at their ideal length and strength, recruited in the correct order with the right degree of activation by a healthy nervous system. Well-aligned joints will have good range of movement, be stable, and have ligaments of a perfect length and tension, and a fascia framework that has just the right amount of give and tautness." How to achieve this is a more complicated story.

"This is the aim of Pilates," adds Robinson. "You're training your body to stand, sit, and move well with ease, so this becomes automatic, never conscious." As for Murray, he's interested in moving away from the idea of constant muscle activation and toward taking a more holistic approach in the hope of dialing down stress. "Everyone will experience tight muscles and pain at some point, but now we know the body, including the back, is inherently robust," he says. "However, if sleep and exercise are compromised and stress elevated, your chances of tightening up and feeling pain increase.

I've learned to value sleep more than ever, I have a hot bath every evening to relax, and I mix up my exercise sessions, because variety of movement is so beneficial. Getting your lifestyle in order is a great tonic for your physical and mental state." So, take a load off.

FIND PEACE ANYWHERE

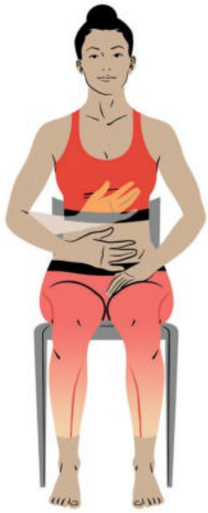
When we're feeling tense, a lot of us beat ourselves up for being "too upset" and command ourselves to "calm down," says Andrea Parsons, LCSW. "But this doesn't work, because you cannot berate yourself into a state of emotional wellbeing." Instead, she says, acknowledge that those feelings are your brain's way of trying to protect you, and then actively create calm within yourself with a visualization exercise. Sit comfortably and close your eyes or focus your gaze on a single point. Take several slow, deep breaths. Now imagine a peaceful place that you either have been to or are creating in your mind. Next, invite all five senses to bring your image to life: What do you see? What sounds do you hear? What aromas surround you in this peaceful place? What are you touching? What do you taste? Where do you feel calm? Hold this image and all the sensations it inspires in your mind. You may return here whenever you like. It is your place for relaxation.

USE A MANTRA.

Repeat this quote when you're feeling tight and overwhelmed: "Trust future you to handle future problems." In other words, whatever happens in the future will be handled when it needs to be, says Emily Anhalt, Ph.D. No use worrying about it now.

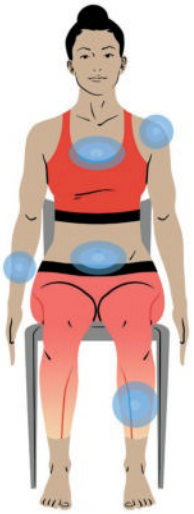
Give It a Rest

Use these drills to power down when you feel your muscles tightening up.



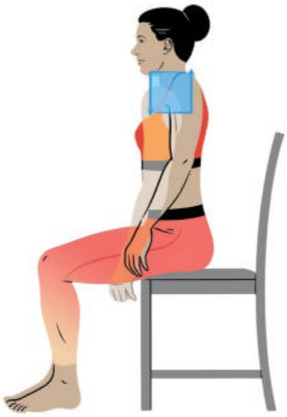
Belly Breathing

Place a hand just above your pubic bone and breathe in through your nose, low into your belly, and even lower. Watch your hand rise and fall. Take a few deep breaths, then move your focus onto lateral thoracic breathing. Move your hand onto your lower rib cage and take your breath wide into your lower rib cage and back. Do this for two minutes a few times a day to reset your breath.



Body Scan

Take 20 seconds to scan your body for areas of tension or discomfort. Imagine the area is heavy, soft, or melting. Feel the weight of your feet on the floor, the weight of your thighs and pelvis on the chair, and the weight of your torso against the backrest. Feel your arms heavy, your neck soft. Repeat throughout the day when you feel tension or aches increasing.



Shoulder Box

To relieve tension while seated, imagine you're drawing a box shape with your shoulders. Slide both shoulders forward a little as if along the bottom of two boxes, then upward along the front. Slide them back along the top of the boxes and then release them down the back of the boxes. Repeat five times, keeping your spine lengthened.

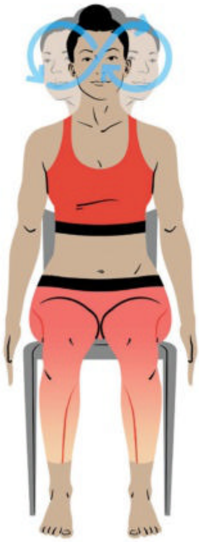


Figure Eight

If you find your neck becoming tense while working at a desk, imagine a figure eight shape lying on its side in front of your nose. Trace the curves of the eight with your nose, allowing your head to move, too. Start in the middle and finish back in the middle. Go both ways several times. It releases the small muscles at the top of the neck.

Refine Your Response to Stress

How you respond to challenges has an impact on how quickly you'll conquer hurdles. This tool helps you discover your coping style—and how you can react more effectively. Are you…

…The Processor?

You tend to turn inward for answers (going for a run, taking a hot shower) and take the time to get clarity. This can be a great way to develop understanding, but you can get stuck in a cycle of emotions with no real plan, says psychologist Carla Marie Manly, Ph.D., author of *Joy From Fear*.

Expert Tip: Take one small action that addresses your problem head-on (signing up for therapy)—then focus on the feeling of empowerment that motivates you to keep going.

…The Problem Solver?

In an emergency, you're solution-oriented. Taking action on issues makes you feel better, but you tend to skip the emotional step. It can mean you're bypassing your emotions during a situation, and you need to address them at some point so they don't build up, says Manly.

Expert Tip: Make expressing yourself, not fixing something, your first step. If you're feeling low and need help sorting through it, call on a friend.

…The Avoider?

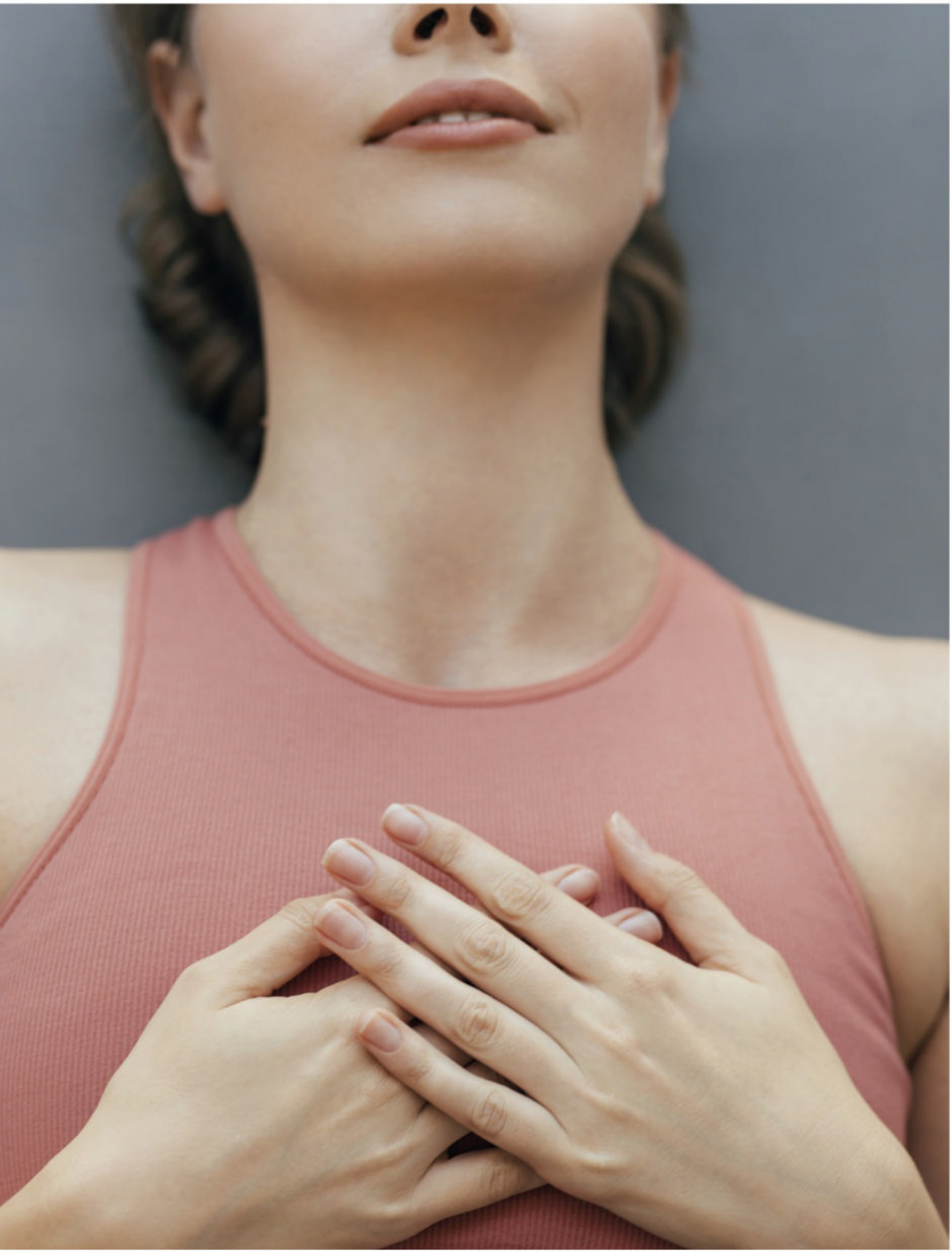
You can be a stick-your-head-in-the-sand kind of gal. You don't want to acknowledge, much less resolve, emotions. Though these behaviors may comfort in the moment, they're not a long-term salve.

Expert Tip: Ask yourself, *Is ignoring this going to give me what I want in the future?* The key to escaping an avoidant state is to imagine being in the current position forever: You probably don't want to stay there, and the time to start moving onward is now.

Breathe Your Way Calmer

THE SECRET to feeling less stressed, more energized and much happier? It's been under our noses all along. When was the last time you thought about your breathing—the last time you ran for a bus? Given that we take more than 17,000 breaths a day, it's worth taking notice. "When we harness breath, we can use our body to tell our mind to slow down," explains breathing and relaxation expert Dominique Antiglio, from BeSophro clinic. In moments of stress, our breathing can become short and shallow. But taking slow, deep breaths is a quick-fix calming method.

"By aiding relaxation, controlled breathing lowers the impact of the stress hormone cortisol on your body and even improves core muscle stability," says general practitioner Ismat Nasiruddin, M.D. "Stress leaves your immune system susceptible to numerous health conditions, so deep breathing can help reduce these effects, too," Nasiruddin says. One study, conducted by the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention in Iowa, found that diaphragmatic breathing helped lower blood pressure. Another from Brigham Young University found breathing at resonance frequency (six breaths per minute) plays a role in lowering heart rate.



The Best Breath-Work Exercises For…

First Thing in the Morning

TECHNIQUE:
Yang Breathing

- Inhale through the nose for four counts.
- Exhale through the mouth for four counts.
- Imagine circulating the air down the front of your chest to your belly and your pelvis.
- Then, imagine it flowing up along your back, around your head and back to your chest.
- Repeat this loop 10 times.

Calming Anxiety

TECHNIQUE:
The Tension Relax

- First, breathe in and out naturally a few times to establish your rhythm.
- Take a long and slow inhalation through the nose.
- Hold the breath for four to five seconds, whichever feels most natural to you.
- Tense up the muscles in your body on that hold-breath.
- Exhale through the mouth vigorously, simultaneously releasing the muscles on this breath.
- Repeat three times.

Boosting Energy

TECHNIQUE: The Pump

- Standing up, inhale through the nose for a count of four.
- Hold your breath and 'pump' your shoulders five times to get the blood circulating.
- Relax the shoulders and breathe out through the mouth for eight counts.
- Repeat three times.

Last Thing at Night

TECHNIQUE: Yin Breathing

- Inhale through the nose for four counts and hold.
- Imagine circulating the air up to the crown of your head, down the back of your head and through the back of your body to your bottom.
- Then, imagine it flowing up from your pelvis, through your belly and your chest, and up to the crown again.
- Exhale through the mouth for four counts.
- Repeat 10 times.

Getting to Sleep

TECHNIQUE: The Sleep Gatekeeper

- Close your eyes and bring focus to the breath.
- Take a steady, deep breath in through the nose, mouth closed, to the count of three to four. Feel your chest expanding and your diaphragm contracting.
- Exhale to double the length of time, opening the mouth slightly. Feel your chest contracting and your diaphragm expanding.
- When it starts to feel rhythmic, so you almost no longer need to count, every time you breathe in, think of a positive word, such as recuperation, relaxation, or calm.
- Focus on the sensations these words trigger throughout the body and let them go as you exhale.
- Repeat until you fall asleep.

STRETCH YOUR WAY HAPPIER & HEALTHIER

It's never too late to become more supple, and you can boost your mental and physical well-being while you're at it.

Cardiovascular exercise gets a ton of attention—and for good reason. It keeps your heart healthy and your body leaner. But flexibility moves can do so much for our bodies too, making us feel longer, leaner, and more relaxed. "Muscles only work well when they are full length and elastic," says physiotherapist Sally Roberts. "They're surrounded and supported by sheaths of fascia, connective tissue that holds the body together, so when you move one part, the rest also moves. Having tight, restricted fascia means that structures can't slip and slide easily; it's like expecting movement between layers of material that have stitches all the way through them."

Better Body Benefits

Stretching after exercise increases circulation and helps workout recovery. But there are so many other important gains.

- **FLEXIBILITY** It keeps muscles supple and strong; we need to stretch to keep joints fully mobile.
- **POSTURE** It can release that tense, hunched look for better posture.
- **HEALTH** Stretching may help deliver nutrients and hydration to muscles, reduce high blood pressure, and help improve sleep patterns.
- **MIND** Want to reduce anxiety and stress? Doing relaxing moves to stretch out tense muscles can help.
- **DIGESTION** Gentle twisting and yoga moves that target the middle of your body are believed to reduce inflammation and support the intestines.

Finding Your Flex...

There are a whole range of exercise styles with built-in stretches to encourage your flexibility, mobility and posture. Try them at home, at the gym, or online.

YOGA

THE RELEASING STRETCH

It doesn't take a genius to realize that yoga is stretch nirvana. But if you're flex phobic (fearful that you might tear something), then that pretty much proves your tense body needs yoga's relax-and-unfold abilities.

FLEX FACTOR The gold standard. "When you stretch, you open up different parts of the body," says yoga teacher Emma Heroise. "Fold forward and you open up the backs of the legs and your back. Twisting opens one side of the body and gives organs on the inside a circulation boost. Yoga stretches are like self-massage."

CLASS ACT Don't stress about not being able to bend like a pretzel, and don't let choosing a style of yoga hold you back. "Any yoga is good for stretching; it's the approach you take in class that matters," says Heroise. "Feel empowered to lengthen the toes, fingers, hips, and hamstrings. Open the shoulders and release the neck, chest, and jaw. You can do all of the above in a gentle hatha class with its slow pace and postures. Or try fast-paced vinyasa, where the stretch becomes fluid, oiling joints and warming muscles."

BIG BENEFITS Along with a supple body and stronger muscles, yoga poses plus breath work can help boost circulation, mood, focus, sleep, and posture.

OK FOR ALL? Yoga is a good move for those with mobility requirements. If your local studio is accessible, ask about seated yoga classes, which work for wheelchair users and those who are less able to walk. Find more yoga workouts starting on p. 54.

BARRE CLASS

THE TONING STRETCH

If you love the idea of finding your flexibility via ballet-inspired moves, this is definitely for you.

FLEX FACTOR "The beauty of barre work is that almost every movement involves what we call an active stretch," explains Vicki Anstey, creator of Barreworks workout studio. "This means that while one muscle group is working, another is stretching and we can sustain movements for longer as we transition between muscle activation and muscle relaxation. The result is that you are building stamina, as well as strength and flexibility." Win, win.

CLASS ACT You'll be at the barre, but may also use hand weights and resistance bands, and work your way around the body to ensure every muscle group and joint is used. 'No two classes are exactly the same, but every class begins with the same warm-up and finishes with a final stretch,' says Anstey.

BIG BENEFITS Flexibility, of course, plus strength, stamina, and joint mobility. "Key joints are continually tested for stability and mobility,' says Vicki. "This causes the release of synovial fluid, which lubricates them and keeps them healthy."

OK FOR ALL? Fine for most adults right up until 70-plus. Classes are often small, so you'll get individual attention and modifications for fitness levels.

EXERCISE BALL

THE FLEXIBLE STRETCH

If you bought an exercise ball years ago, it's time to retrieve it from the back of the cupboard, because it could truly become your flexible friend.

FLEX FACTOR Using a gym ball is a great way to get supple and, as a bonus, de-stress. "Stretching is a very satisfying way of releasing tension from the body and hugely important for our movement skills and mobility, particularly as we get older," says fitness consultant Lucy Knight.

CLASS ACT Doing moves on an exercise ball will really power up your fitness routine.

In a gym ball class, expect to go through exercises using a large ball, which, because it's basically unstable, encourages you to use your core muscles. "Using a ball means you have something firm, yet comfortable, to drape yourself over in a multitude of directions," says Knight. "This offers you many more stretches and a greater range of movement than the flat surface of the floor, as you can use the ball's motion to roll in and out of a stretch, as well as easily adjust the intensity."

BIG BENEFITS Improved balance, stability, agility, and body toning are all in the mix.

OK FOR ALL? Yes, if you take it steady and choose a great instructor, anyone can go for it. Get the feel of exercising with a ball by using it as a seat at home when at a table or desk.

TAI CHI

THE SERENE STRETCH

Tai chi might be all about balance, but the good news is that beneficial stretches are at its heart.

FLEX FACTOR "Tai chi is an accessible form of stretching; far more so than other forms of fitness such as yoga or Pilates," says teacher Emma Cooke. 'These are great for you, but tai chi does not feature floor work and certain styles are accessible to everyone."

CLASS ACT We've probably all seen a tai chi class–people standing in a group, possibly in a park, practicing flowing movements plus breath work performed in a slow, focused way. "It's a gentle stretch of the body that improves your ability to open joints," says Cooke. "We emphasize not to overstretch, to avoid tension and stay relaxed. The stretching gives the impression of exertion, but tai chi movements are actually soft, gentle, and mindful, with the knees soft and the arms never fully outreached."

BIG BENEFITS Muscle strength, balance, and flexibility. It's said to help improve cognitive function, help you get better sleep, reduce the risk of falls, ease pain and anxiety, and more.

OK FOR ALL? Yes, if you find the right style for you. Cooke teaches Master Joe Lok style. "It has variations, adaptable to every individual," she says. "Unlike traditional styles, you do not need to be perfect with footwork and stances. It aims for a relaxed mindset. My motto is: 'You can't do it wrong, only different!'"

PILATES

THE DYNAMIC STRETCH

If you thought Pilates was all core-centric, think again. "It's a shame that Pilates is considered to be all about core strength," says expert Lynne Robinson. "It's so much more than that; core stability is just one of the principles of Pilates."

FLEX FACTOR If, like the rest of us, you feel tense and

hunched most of the time, a Pilates class could be the making of a new, more body-aware you. So where's the stretch? "We prefer to use dynamic stretching, rather than static stretching," says Robinson. "Flexibility is achieved through movement. And motion is lotion to the body, joints, and fascia. By mobilizing joints, we encourage the production of the synovial fluid that lubricates them."

CLASS ACT "The starting point is to bring your awareness to your body," says Robinson. 'To notice where you might be 'holding tension' and to find better, more natural neutral alignment for your joints. Then you can do exercises that will gently mobilize your joints without adding stress or strain."

BIG BENEFITS There are many: flexibility, as you work toward a range of motion within the joints, plus improved posture, core stability, a lean look, and increased energy.

OK FOR ALL? The beauty of Pilates is that it's adaptable to any age or fitness level. There's an endless menu of moves and modifications to help you through the learning process.

MELT METHOD

THE ROLLING STRETCH

This new way of finding your flex is a self-treatment technique that aims to help eliminate pain and stress.

FLEX FACTOR
The Melt Method helps release restrictions in the fascia—the collagen and elastin web that supports every muscle, organ, and bone in your body. If it is pliable and supportive, things are great. If it's damaged, you get aches and pains, and feel out of kilter. "Melt can improve mobility and reduce discomfort brought on by all the things we do just going about our lives," says Melt teacher Monica Halper.

CLASS ACT Classes are performed on the floor, using foam rollers and small treatment balls. Learn the moves in classes, then practice at home. "Melt is more a lifestyle than an endgame," says Halper. "We wouldn't just brush our teeth daily for a month, then stop!"

BIG BENEFITS Fewer aches and pains, and less body tension, but there's more. "The layer of fascia is where our sensory nerves live, so it can have a profound impact on our nervous system," says Halper. Which means you may experience better digestion, moods, and sleep, too.

OK FOR ALL? Most definitely. It's considered good for anyone wanting to slow the aging process, especially if you're 50-plus. The Melt Method is great if you want to stay active and mobile for longer.

How Regular Stretching Benefits Your Heart Health

Stretching before and after exercise has often been advised for better performance, faster recovery, and reduced injury risk. But research in the *Journal of Physiology* suggests the practice could have even bigger health benefits than you think.

Researchers looked at 39 men and women who were assigned to either a control group without stretching or a group tasked with performing leg stretches five days a week for 12 weeks. After the 12 weeks were up, those in the stretching group showed increased blood flow in their lower legs and upper arms, and reduced arterial stiffness, leading researchers to conclude that this type of stretching could help prevent diseases related to vascular issues—like heart disease and diabetes.

Researchers also noted that there was significant improvement in ankle and knee joint range of motion for the stretching group.

This study was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the study's authors stated that increased stretching could be especially helpful now that we may be staying in and working from home more, as a way to improve risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and other conditions.

If you're ready to incorporate more passive stretching into your workout routine—which can also help reduce running-related soreness and assist in muscle recovery—be sure you've got the timing right, according to Aaron Leventhal, C.S.C.S., owner of Minneapolis-based Fit Studio. He says the conventional wisdom is to do dynamic stretches before exercise and passive stretching after. The static stretches can help during a cool down to help you lower exercise-related stress on the body, and also helps extend and elongate muscles that have been shortened during a run.

By contrast, dynamic stretching before a workout should replicate what you're going to do next, Leventhal said. For example, if you're going to walk or run, you should consider doing walking lunges to prep the legs and hips for that type of movement. Not only could you make your walks and runs more efficient by focusing on stretching correctly, but it seems you could be doing your heart a favor too.

What tools are out there to help you stretch?

Unless you're doing a stretching workout that calls for props like foam rollers or exercise blocks, you don't need any fancy equipment to help you stretch effectively. Some experts recommend something simple like a rope or stretch band to help you go deeper in your stretches. But if you're looking for something robust that targets specific areas, calf and hamstring stretchers are out there too.

Static vs. Dynamic Stretching

Not every stretch is right for every situation. Depending on your goal—whether you're warming up for a run or loosening up during the day—you should stretch accordingly, says Jeff Brannigan, M.S., who has worked with Olympic athletes and is co-founder and program director at Stretch*d, a stretch therapy studio in New York City.

Static Stretching

Static stretches are the traditional methods that everyone knows, like touching your toes and holding for 30 seconds, Brannigan says. After a walk or run, when your body is warm, static stretches can increase range of motion and blood flow, which, in turn, helps with recovery and mental stress. An example of a static stretch is the wall calf stretch: Stand one to two feet away from a wall, step your right foot forward, and place the ball of the foot against the wall while your heel is rooted to the floor. Place your hands on the wall for support. Hold the position for 30 seconds to one minute, then switch feet. By holding the position over time, you'll loosen up the muscle and promote blood flow to the area. However, static stretches can be harmful to your muscles if done before a run. Brannigan says to imagine your muscles are like a rubber band. If you pull on the rubber band in one quick motion and hold it, it'll tear at the edges and damage the elasticity.

Dynamic Stretching

The theory behind dynamic stretching is that if you gently pull on that rubber band in short sets, it will gradually lengthen without harming elasticity. You use short, controlled repetitions to gradually loosen your muscles before activity. Often, dynamic stretches will mimic the motion of that specific activity. An example for a dynamic stretch before your run is leg swings: Stand perpendicular to a wall, and place your hand against the wall to hold yourself out and swing your inside leg in its natural range of motion forward and backward like a pendulum. A stretch like this promotes the natural motion of your body, therefore warming up the exact muscles you'll use on your walk or run without overextending and possibly damaging them. It doesn't necessarily matter what time of day you stretch, as long as you stretch daily, says Brannigan. "What holds people back is that it seems like a big time commitment," he says. "But really, if you can carve 5 to 10 minutes out of your daily routine, you can accomplish a lot." Regardless of whether you stretch in the morning to wake yourself up or stretch before bed to decompress, it'll make a big difference. If you plan on walking or running that day, you should definitely stretch before and afterward. Dynamic stretching beforehand helps warm your muscles up, reducing the chance of injury. Static stretching afterward promotes recovery and blood flow. It's not an extraneous activity you can toss aside—it's a necessary part of your training plan.

PART 2

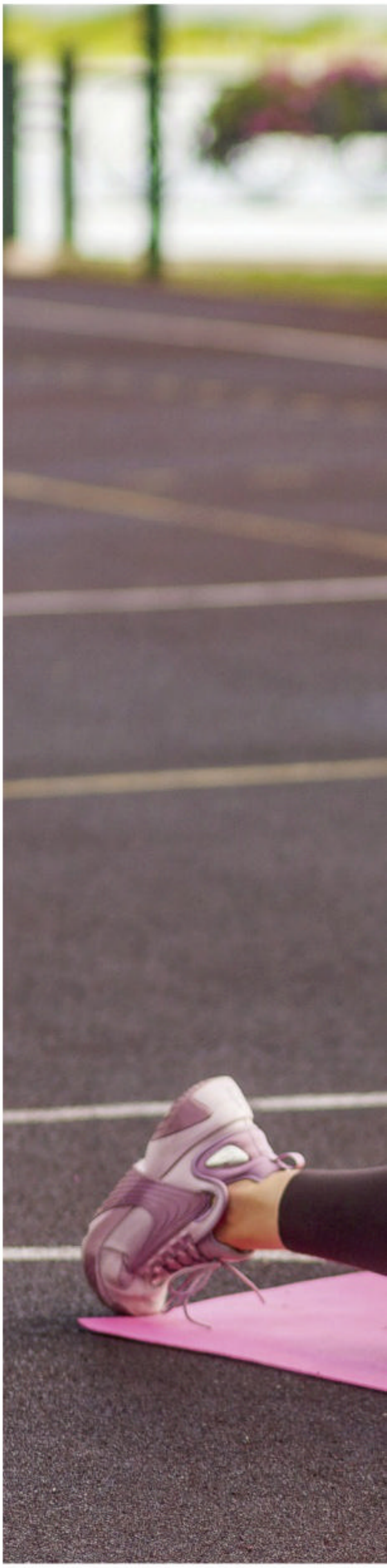
Why Am I So Stiff?

Age or injury may make you feel more rigid than you used to, but that doesn't mean you can't get more flexible.

THE SECRET TO BETTER MOVEMENT

Fascia is the word being whispered by doctors, trainers, yogis, and masseuses alike. But what exactly is it, and how does it impact your body?

BY MARISSA GAINSBURG



For years, it seems as though scientists researching pain, movement, and recovery have been doing the anatomical equivalent of paving over paradise to put up a parking lot. They have tossed fascia—the shiny, webby tissue that covers muscles, nerves, and organs—into the theoretical bin as an afterthought.

But as our understanding of our bodies' complex processes evolves, this long-overlooked part of our anatomy may hold new scientific answers. The consensus is growing that fascia has a key role to play in our fitness, performance, and general health.

Before we can get into all fascia does, you have to first understand what it is. Imagine an orange: If the peel is our skin, the white stuff beneath it—the threads that surround each wedge and hold them together as one sphere—is like our fascia. This connective substance is made up of spongy glycoproteins, protein-dense collagen fibers, and various other cells (such as fat cells). And similar to the orange pith, its main job is to keep your internal bits—muscles, joints, tendons, bones, all of it—in place. Layers of this tissue run through your entire body.

But why has it gotten so buzzy, popping up in "fascial yoga" and "fascial massage" in studios and spas? For one, new tools are letting researchers see and measure what it's doing inside your body. That makes the material much sexier to those in lab coats. And perhaps the bigger reason: As functional medicine and fitness—or considering the body as a whole rather than focusing on individual areas—becomes more widespread, practitioners are taking a closer look at the common threads that bind every part of our body.

"Fascia is one of the most important and pervasive systems, because it connects every system together," says Rebecca Pratt, Ph.D., a professor of anatomy at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine. First and foremost, healthy fascia is crucial to comfortable daily movement and exercise performance. (Ever been so tight from sitting that your stairs felt like Mt. Everest? That's your angry fascia talking.) It's also key to injury recovery because it weaves between vessels and supports blood flow. Fit fascia may even ease your mind, because it wraps around the nerves that send messages to your brain.

What's more, because fascia contains cells that "talk" to one another, as well as to other cells throughout your body, researchers now think this tissue might be the channel through which conditions like autoimmune diseases or cancer spread. "If a cell doesn't hear proper job signals and goes rogue, it can leave the fascia and move into a place it's not supposed to be, doing things it's not supposed to do," says Pratt.

So how do you make sense of a physiological system as profound, as abstract, and as vital to our existence as outer space? It's simple, actually. Our guide will have you embodying the healthy, flexible person you were born to be.

FASCIA And How You Feel

5 Problems, 1 Fix

One of the body's most integrated systems, your connective tissue, can be the cause of—or solution to—many energy and mobility issues. Here's how to take control of it.

1 HEADACHES

A throbbing head is often related to cranky fascia in your neck. Here's why: When your head and shoulders shift forward instead of staying aligned with your spine, the muscles and the fascia at the base of your head tighten, while the ones that control your shoulders grow weak. The combo leads to tension headaches.
Prevent It: Do three sets of 12 seated rows with weights three times a week to improve body alignment.

2 LIMITED MOVEMENT

After surgery or injury, your body forms scar tissue that can replace healthy fascia. That's problematic, since normal tissue fibers are flexible. But as scar tissue thickens, it can leave adhesions in the fascia that limit your range of motion.
Prevent It: Once the damaged area has healed, begin gentle massage techniques, like gliding the skin forward and back, then side to side, for several minutes a few times a day. If you're nervous about messing with your wound, see a physical therapist.

3 STICKY JOINTS

Tightness in your muscles and surrounding fascia can cause joints to stiffen, making your body move in ways that can create long-term issues. A prime example: Tight calves reduce your toes' ability to flex, changing your gait.
Prevent It: Foam-roll or stretch any tense area after each workout, as your muscles respond best when warm. Try three 30-second standing calf stretches (legs straight, heels down) daily.

4 BACK PAIN

Where your thoracic (middle) and lumbar (lower) spine meet can be a spider web of chaos, because muscles supporting your top and bottom half intersect there. This means restricted fascia anywhere—especially in your hamstrings or quads—can pull on the fascia here, inviting soreness. Ever heard of your psoas? It's a muscle in your hip flexors that PTs love to talk about, since it's vital for core strength.
Prevent It: Stretching your hip flexors can help (try pigeon pose on p. 65), but also foam-roll your hamstrings at least twice a week.

5 UNHAPPY FEET

Plantar fasciitis, or heel pain due to inflamed fascia in the sole of your foot, strikes 2 million people each year, especially runners. The condition can usually be traced to tightness around the calves, though flat feet (from weak leg muscles) may play a part. While the pain itself can be debilitating, it presents a much bigger problem: Because our bodies are one kinetic chain, problems at the bottom can spark imbalances farther up when other muscles compensate. The result? Limping, less agility, or often, injury.
Prevent It: Roll your feet over a lacrosse ball, for a minute each, ideally every day. Super active? Foam-roll your calves for up to five minutes each—that kinetic chain works in reverse too.

The Experts: David Nolan, DPT, CSCS, associate clinical professor of physical therapy at Northeastern University, clinical specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital Sports Physical Therapy; Chad Waterbury, DPT, physical therapist in Los Angeles.

THE SCIENCE OF JOINT HEALTH

If you're feeling stiff and creaky and sounding squeaky, think of this as an owner's guide to your joints.

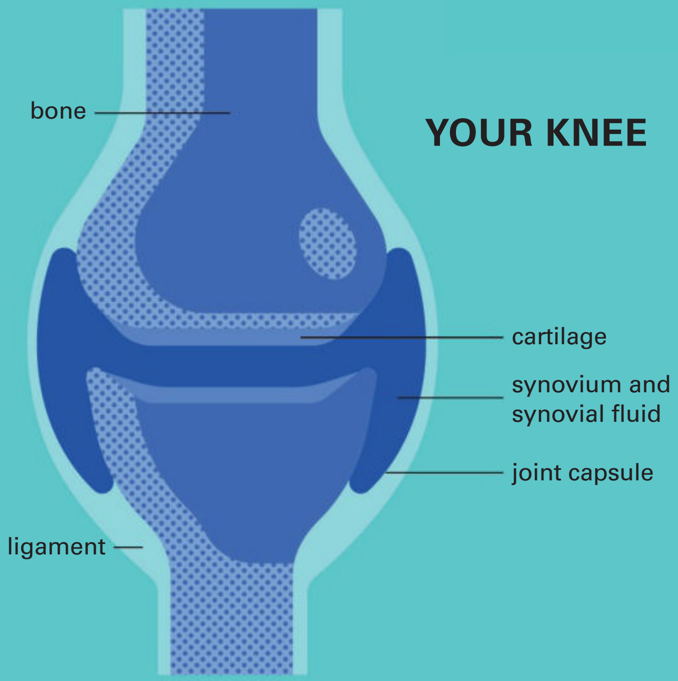
Joints are the body's hardworking hinges. When healthy, they connect bone to bone and give you the range of motion you need to carry out daily activities. But women are particularly vulnerable to joint pain, stiffness, and frustration, says Maura Daly Iversen, D.P.T., S.D., the dean of Sacred Heart University's College of Health Professions in Fairfield, CT.

Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts that by 2040, two-thirds of arthritis (joint inflammation) sufferers will be female.

Experts point to a number of explanations for the disparity between men and women in arthritis. For starters, obesity is a major risk factor for osteoarthritis, and weight gain triggered by menopause can place stress on joints. Plus, hormones make our ligaments more lax, so they offer less support for joints at certain points in the menstrual cycle. Some research suggests that the angle of women's hips to their knees could make us more prone to anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries, another factor in osteoarthritis. We are also much more likely to have autoimmune-related joint conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. "Women's immune systems seem to be more robust than men's," says Iris Navarro-Millan, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College and attending physician at Hospital for Special Surgery.

But this disease-fighting superpower could put our immune systems into overdrive, leading them to misguidedly attack our joints. Fortunately, there's much you can do to keep your hinges happy. Exercise and maintaining a healthy weight are key. "Regular activity keeps joints nourished and lubricated and strengthens the muscles and tendons that keep them stable and protected," says Kathy Weber, M.D., an assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Rush University Medical Center. "And every extra 10 pounds you carry increases the load on your weight-bearing joints by 40 pounds."

In addition to straining joints, obesity can cause metabolic changes that promote pain and inflammation. But you don't need to lose a lot to make a big difference: Dropping just 5% to 10% of your body weight can reduce knee pain and significantly improve function. Read on for more ways to ease pain.


YOUR KNEE
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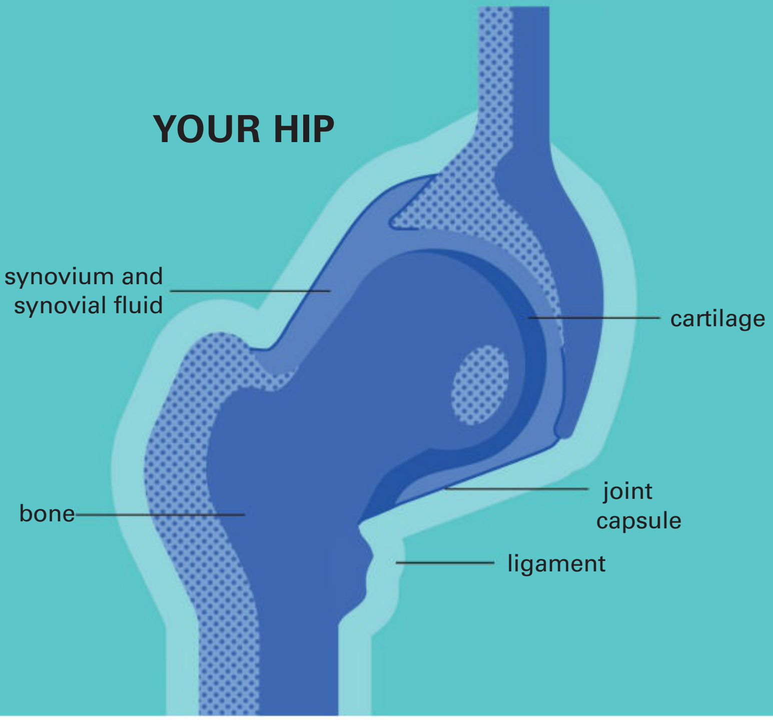
cartilage
synovium and synovial fluid
joint capsule
ligament


YOUR HIP
synovium and synovial fluid
cartilage
bone
joint capsule
ligament

A Look Inside

Joints come in different types — ball-and-socket ones allow motion in all directions, as in your hip and shoulder, while hinge joints, as in your knees and elbows, go back and forth. However, they share essential components:

BONE: The building blocks of our body, bones have rich networks of nerve fibers.

CARTILAGE: Fluid-filled and bouncy, this acts like a shock absorber. Healthy cartilage is as smooth as glass, allowing bones to glide across each other without any friction.

SYNOVIUM:
The synovium lies underneath the joint capsule, which encases the joint.

SYNOVIAL FLUID:
It lubricates the joint and nourishes cartilage.

LIGAMENTS:
These tough yet flexible fibrous bands attach bone to bone, providing stability and support for the whole joint.

Do Supplements Work?
Turmeric, cinnamon, and glucosamine are just a few of the substances on the market touted as improving joint health and reducing pain. However, scientific evidence for their effectiveness is inconclusive. Talk to your doctor to see if they think one could help you.

Exercise for Happy Joints

It's said that when it comes to joints, "motion is lotion." So what exercise is best? "Walking is always great, but anything you enjoy enough to stick with will do the trick," says Karen Litzy, D.P.T., owner of Karen Litzy Physical Therapy in New York City. Even running, once thought to be a fast path to developing arthritis, has been redeemed. In fact, a recent study found that serious runners were at no greater risk for knee arthritis. But keep these tips in mind:

Start smart.

"Warming up for a few minutes readies the joint and the muscles around it to reduce the chance of injury," says Dr. Weber. Don't just stretch in place—warm up dynamically, she says. Walk for a few minutes before you pick it up to a jog. If you are just starting an exercise routine, build up slowly in intensity and duration. "I am seeing a lot of injuries in people who didn't work out during quarantine or changed their exercise while working from home and suddenly started pounding the pavement," she says.

Mix it up.

"A blend of activities is best," adds Dr. Weber. Variety strengthens different muscle sets and reduces your chances of an overuse injury. An ideal joint-boosting routine combines 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic exercise such as fast walking or biking with a couple of sessions of strength training such as with free weights or resistance bands. "Yoga is fantastic because it increases your flexibility and can provide a mood boost," says Stacey Pierce-Talsma, D.O., M.S., an associate dean at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Improve your balance.

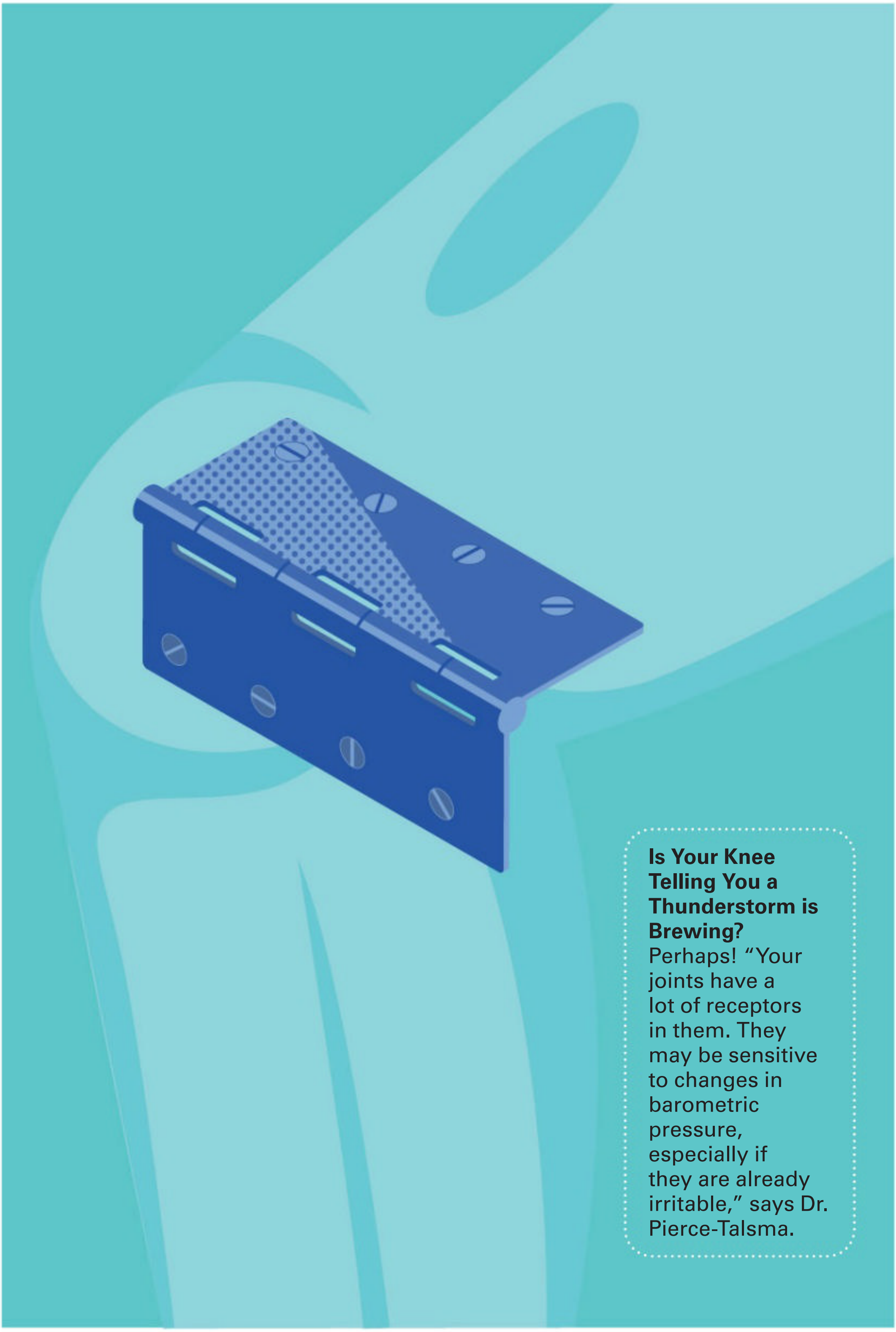
Proprioception is awareness of where your body is in space, which can help you prevent joint injuries. "It's that wobble you feel in your ankle as you stand on one leg," says Dr. Pierce-Talsma. "Proprioception is information going from your joints to your brain and then to your muscles so they contract and you don't fall over." To better your proprioception, try standing on one leg, then the other, for a minute each while you brush your teeth every day.

Don't just sit there.

Long sessions hunched in front of a computer are a recipe for stiffness. Taking regular breaks will help keep joints better lubricated. "Set a timer on your phone as a reminder," suggests Iversen. "Every 30 minutes, walk around or march in place for a few minutes."

Adjust as necessary.

If you do develop a joint condition, there's no reason to become a couch potato. Your doctor or physical therapist can suggest gentle exercises such as using an elliptical trainer, biking, tai chi, or water aerobics.



Is Your Knee Telling You a Thunderstorm is Brewing? Perhaps! “Your joints have a lot of receptors in them. They may be sensitive to changes in barometric pressure, especially if they are already irritable,” says Dr. Pierce-Talsma.

What's Causing My Joint Pain?

Over 30 conditions could be the culprit, and they fall into two categories: mechanical "wear and tear" injuries and inflammatory disorders. Here's more about two of the most common.

1.

Osteoarthritis (OA)

WHAT IT IS: Injury, years of use, genetics, or inflammation can spur the breakdown of bone-protecting cartilage. "Think of it as like potholes developing in a road," says Dr. Weber. In this setting, the lining of the joint, the synovium, can become inflamed as well. When nerve-rich bone is exposed—ouch!

SYMPTOMS: OA can affect numerous joints, but they may not all flare up with symptoms at the same time. Hips, knees, the spine, the base of the thumb, and small hand joints tend to be common OA sites for women. Tenderness and stiffness in affected areas may develop gradually.

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED: Your doctor will conduct a physical exam and take X-rays or other images. They may order blood work to rule out other conditions.

TREATMENT: Because damaged cartilage does not regrow on its own, surgery may be an option, but the goal of treatment is usually to reduce pain and restore function. Dr. Weber often starts by prescribing regular exercise or referring patients for physical therapy to strengthen muscles that support joints. A physical therapist can create an individualized exercise plan to help you feel and function better. Medications such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) can relieve symptoms too. Steroids and other substances may be injected to ease discomfort at the site of a flare. Joint replacement is usually a last resort. "It is important to try conservative measures first," says Dr. Weber.

These two types of arthritis are caused by different issues and are treated differently.

2.

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

WHAT IT IS: The immune system attacks the joints, eventually causing permanent damage. "The joint lining becomes inflamed and produces factors that destroy the cartilage and bone," explains Ellen Gravallese, M.D., division chief of rheumatology, inflammation, and immunity at Brigham and Women's Hospital. RA can run in families, but lifestyle factors can set it in motion. For instance, "if you have a genetic predisposition and you smoke, it can increase the chances of developing RA by as much as 40 times," says Kim Huffman, M.D., Ph.D., an associate professor in the department of medicine in the division of rheumatology at Duke University Medical Center.

SYMPTOMS: One hallmark of RA, says Dr. Gravallese, is that your joints feel stiffest first thing in the morning or after prolonged inactivity, and then "after about an hour of activity and movement, they begin to loosen and feel less painful." (In contrast, OA pain typically gets worse with strenuous activity.) RA often first appears in the small joints of the hands and feet. They may be swollen, warm, and red and flare up on both sides of the body at the same time. RA symptoms can also include whole-body issues like fatigue.

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED: Episodes can come and go and early symptoms can be subtle, which means RA sufferers may not know they have it for months or even years. If you experience unexplained joint issues, be proactive. “The earlier the treatment, the better the outcome,” says Dr. Navarro-Millan. “Rheumatologists are specialists trained in joint disease, so ask for a referral.” Doctors will start with a detailed history and a physical exam. Blood work can help detect markers of inflammation and disease.

TREATMENT: The goal is to halt inflammation to prevent further damage to joints. One option may be “biologics,” a class of drugs that can help downshift the immune system. “These days we have so many good treatments,” says Dr. Huffman. “If you continue to have active disease, you and your doctor can try a different strategy.”

Be proactive if you have unexplained joint pain. The earlier it’s treated, the better.

It could also be...

FIBROMYALGIA

Though common, this condition is still poorly understood: Its sufferers, primarily female, may be wired to be especially sensitive to their bodies’ pain signals. Symptoms include pain all over the body along with muscle aches and fatigue as well as brain fog. Fortunately, this chronic condition doesn’t cause lasting damage to joints.

LYME DISEASE

This infection is caused by bacteria transmitted through tick bites. If left untreated, Lyme disease can cause severe joint pain and swelling, particularly in the knees and other large joints.

LUPUS

Signs of this autoimmune condition include joint pain and swelling, fatigue, and sometimes a butterfly-shaped facial rash. Nine out of 10 sufferers are women.

Ouch! Coping With Sprains

A sprain is the stretching or tearing of ligaments. Ask yourself these questions to decide if yours requires a trip to the doctor or just some TLC.

Can you put weight on it?
A mild sprain should still allow you to get around, if gingerly. “If you can’t, it should be evaluated,” says Dr. Weber.

Is the joint red and hot?
“If the joint is warm to the touch, red, and swollen, these can be signs of inflammation, an infection, or other issues that should be evaluated by a physician,” adds Dr. Weber. Fever, chills, and fatigue are also red flags.

Is it getting better?
It should feel progressively better and resolve within about a week, depending on severity. If not, make an appointment.

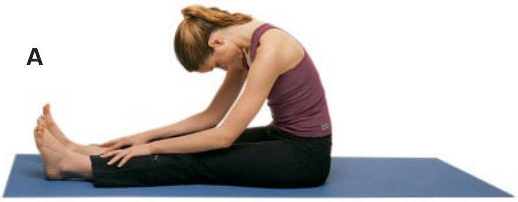
STRETCHING FOR HEALTHY JOINTS

If you're under the care of a doctor or physical therapist for joint pain, consult with your health professional before trying these moves.

For the Knee...

By rotating your knee joints outward and inward, as well as flexing and extending them, you'll improve their stretchability, and, once you relax, the leg muscles melt toward the floor so the body's weight can sink down into the bones, rooting out any tension that has settled into your legs.

A



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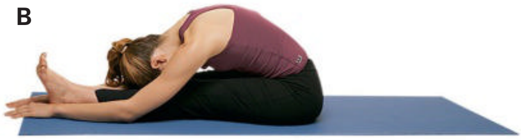
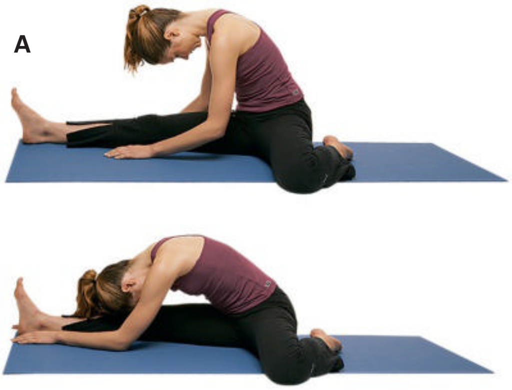


1

Forward Bend Stretch both legs out, feet no more than hip-width apart. Drop chin to chest, stretching muscles and ligaments at base of skull (**A**). Lean forward and reach for shins, ankles, or feet, keeping legs as straight as possible. Relax thighs and feel stretch from skull to ankles (**B**).

A



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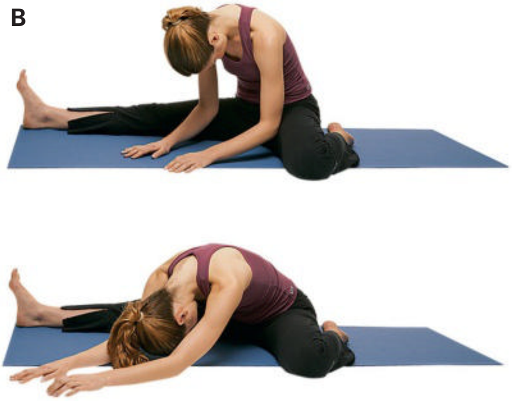
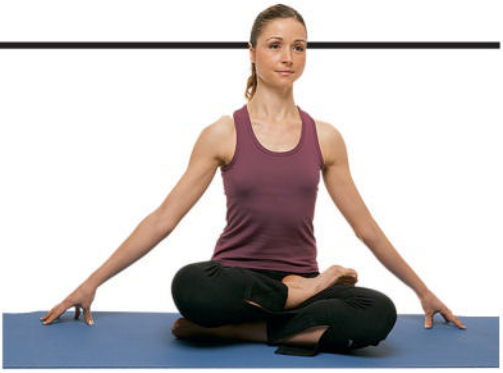


2

Forward Bend 2 Extend right leg and fold left leg beside buttocks. Spread legs comfortably. You can: (**A**) lean forward reaching for shins, ankles, or feet so shoulders are square over extended knee; or (**B**) bring body between legs and lean as far forward as possible. (The first mainly stretches hamstrings, while the second stretches the groin more.)

For the Ankles...

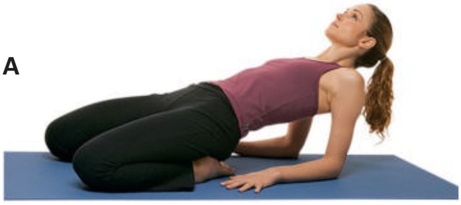
Your ankle moves in four directions: It can point, flex, supinate (turn out), and pronate (turn in). Why should you care? Because it's a lot easier to remove tension from the extremities than from, say, the middle vertebrae. These poses also give you increased circulation and decreased swelling.



1

Crisscross Starting in a cross-legged position, take right foot with both hands. Rotate right thigh outward, bringing outer side of ankle to rest on left thigh, preferably in hip crease. Repeat on other side.

A



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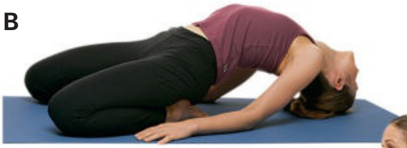

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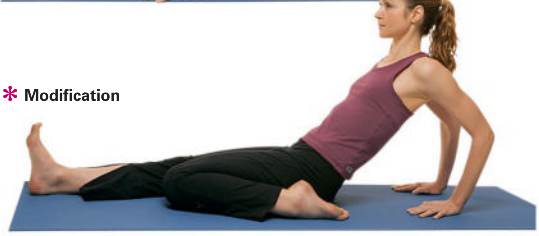


2

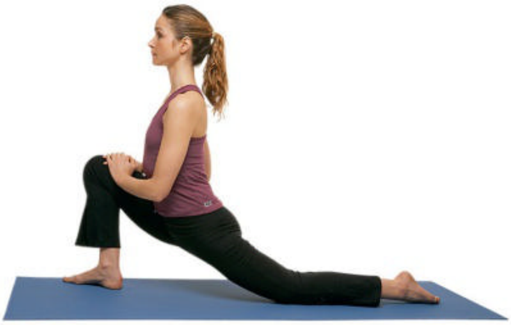
Bent Knee Pose Sit on feet and spread knees apart widely. Try to lower body backward, resting weight on forearms (**A**). If comfortable, arch back and rest weight on head (**B**). (To go farther, rest entire spine on floor.) Repeat on both sides.

✻ **Modification:** Extend one leg while placing other foot alongside body to the side (not under buttocks).

Ankle exercises continued

3

Lunge Pose (with foot turned out) Place right foot on floor in front of you and turn it out. Rest left knee on floor behind you. With hands on ground for balance, bring weight into top of back thigh (**A**). If comfortable, lower onto forearms and release upper-body weight to stretch the hip more deeply (**B**).



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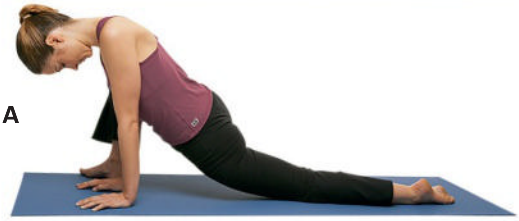

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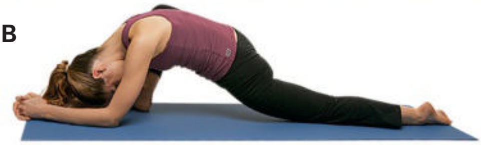
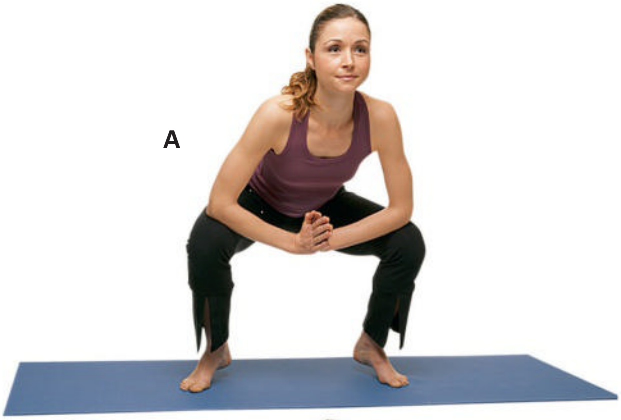


Ankle exercises continued

3

Squat Start with feet slightly wider than hip-width apart. Fold forward, knees bent, with hands between knees (**A**). Lift chest and straighten back, sinking hips toward floor. Bring hands to namaste at your sternum (**B**).

* **Modification:** Place a blanket under heels.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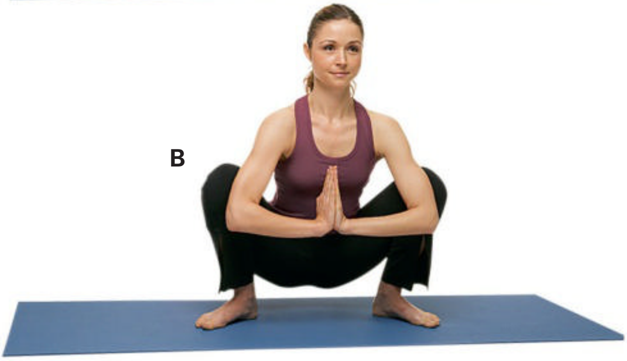
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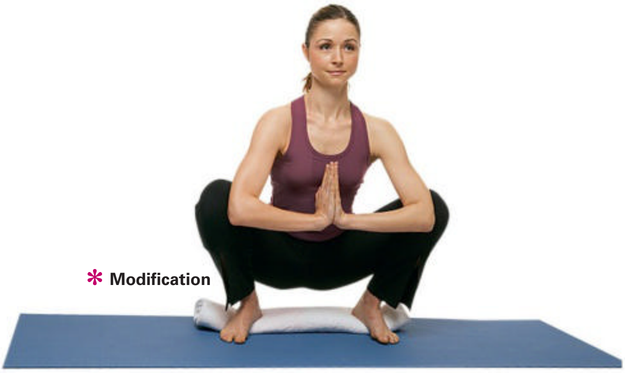
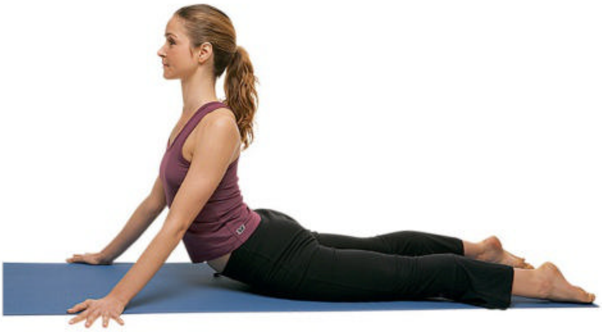

* Modification

For Your Neck...

Use these poses to increase and maintain movement in your neck—forward, backward, side to side, right, and left. Getting rid of pent-up compression in the neck help you say good riddance to tension-caused troubles like headaches and insomnia.



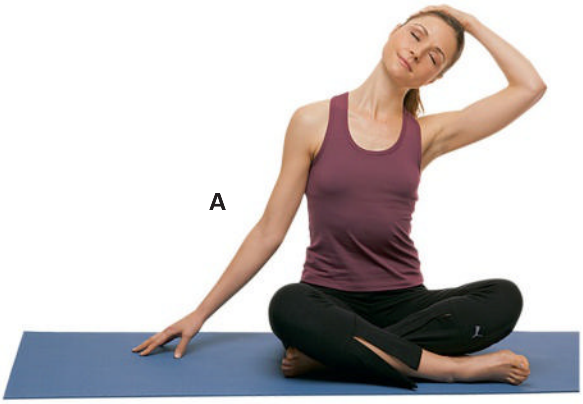
1

Upward Bend Lie on stomach with hands on floor in front of you and as wide as mat. Straighten arms and raise torso off floor. Turn hands so fingers are turned out to side. (Depending on anatomy, pelvis may be off floor.) Allow belly to hang and spine to arch slowly.

For Your Shoulders...

These poses work this joint in about six ways, so you can painlessly reach around behind you, grab the zipper to your shirt, and zip it, all without a single cringe or twinge.

A



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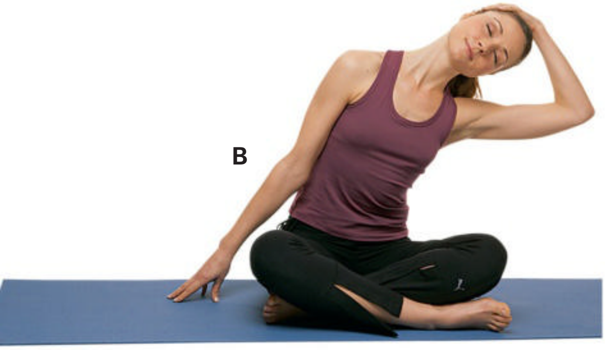
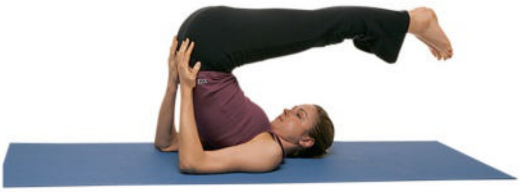


2

Simple Neck Stretch Place left hand over crown of head. Allow weight of hand to bring left ear toward left shoulder. (**A**) By tipping chin up for a full minute and then down, you'll release neck tension (**B**). Repeat on other side. Now switch sides and repeat, this time allowing side bend to include the length of body. Lean left, then repeat on right side.



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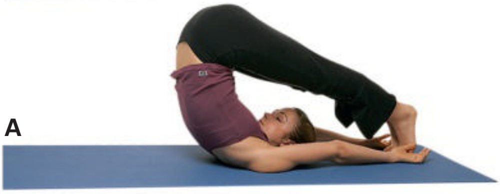

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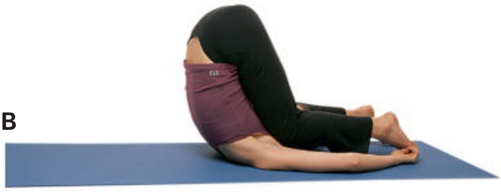

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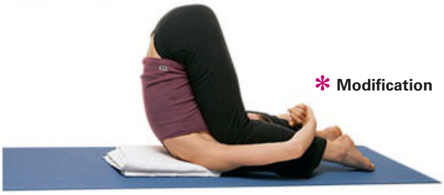
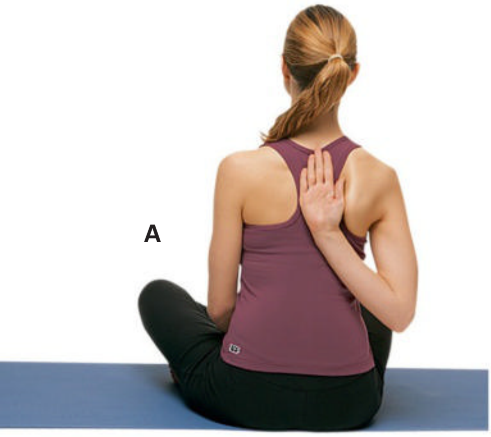


3

Inverted Pose Lying on back with hands under buttocks, roll legs up and over head. (**A**) (Support hips with hands if needed.) Place toes on ground behind head. (**B**) If toes touch ground, clasp calves, ankles, or feet with hands. Keep weight between shoulders; don't roll up on neck yet. Bend knees toward floor, then roll up on neck.

* **Modification**: For comfort, pad upper back, as shown.

A



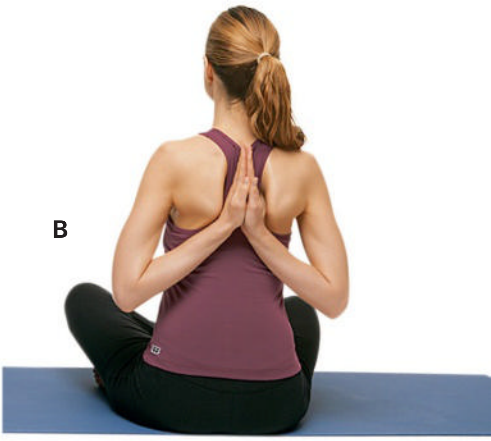
1

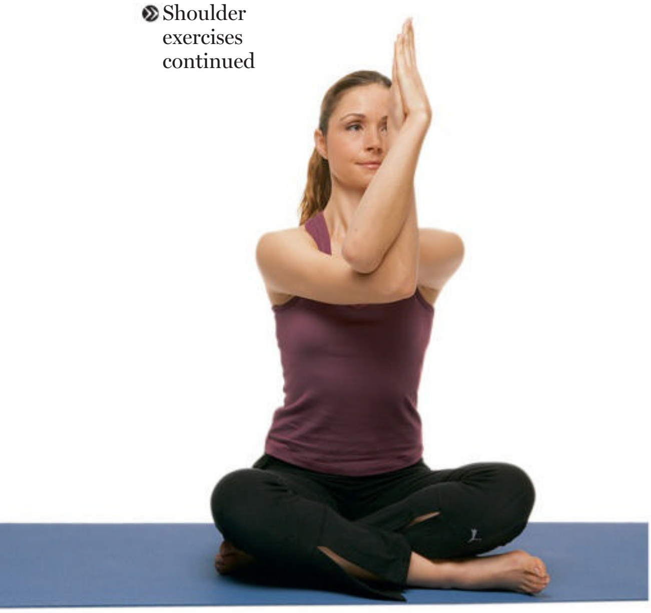
Backward Reach

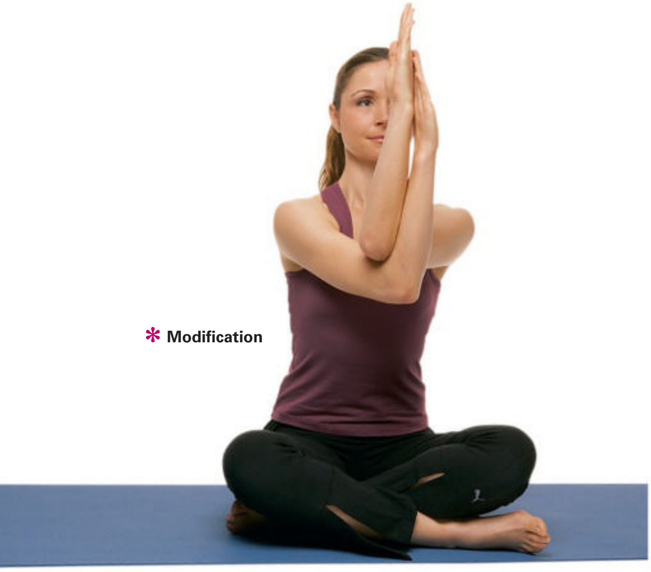
Extend right arm, palm facing backward. Bring back of hand to middle of back, then repeat on other side (**A**). Too comfortable? Try namaste or Prayer pose behind you while pinkies rest between scapula (**B**).

» Shoulder exercises continued

B





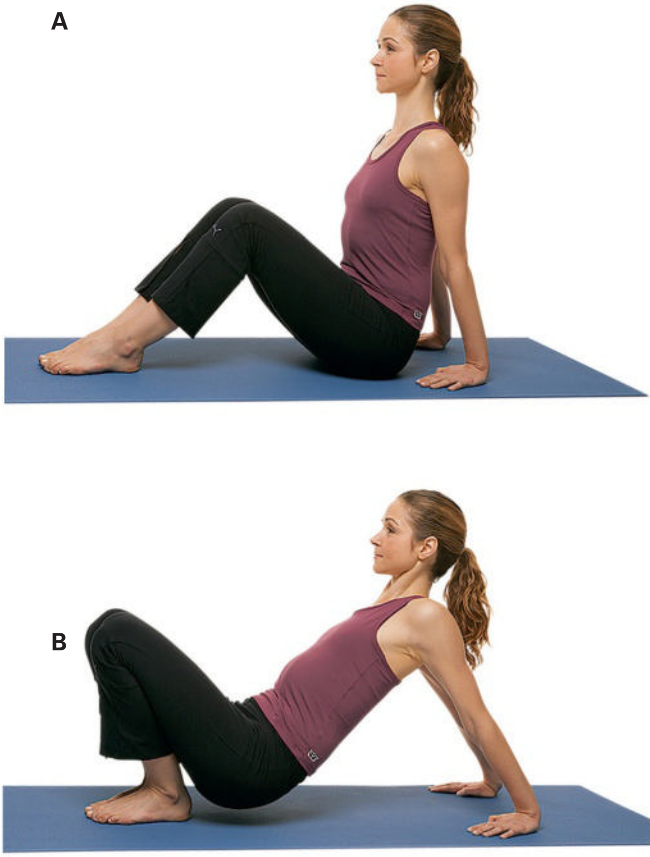


* **Modification**

2

Crossed Arms Extend arms to sides. Sweep right arm under left, bringing right fingertips to inside of left palm. Drop shoulders down and raise elbows. Fingertips extend and wrists stay long. Switch sides.

* **Modification:** If fingertips do not reach palm, work with fronts of hands together.

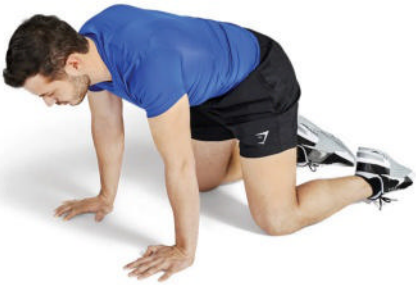


3

Hammock Sit down with hands (palms facing down) at sides and arch fingers forward (**A**). Walk butt out to get a deep shoulder stretch (**B**). Rest butt on floor.

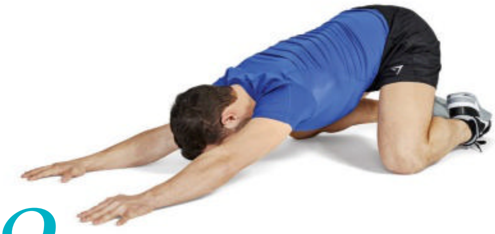
For Your Back...

Your spine is meant to move in multiple directions,
even if it doesn't seem that way when you get up from the couch.
These moves help get it moving and generates
the blood flow that the muscles near your spine crave.



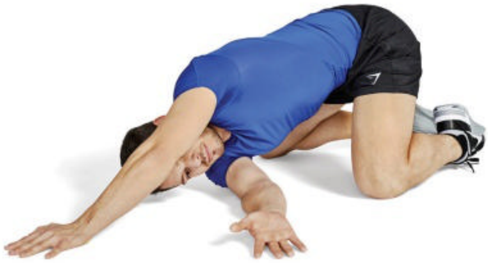
1

Bear Pose Get on all fours. Make sure your hands are directly below your shoulders and your knees are in line with your wrists. Tighten your abs and keep your lower back flat, as if you were balancing a glass of water on it. Hold for 2 deep breaths.



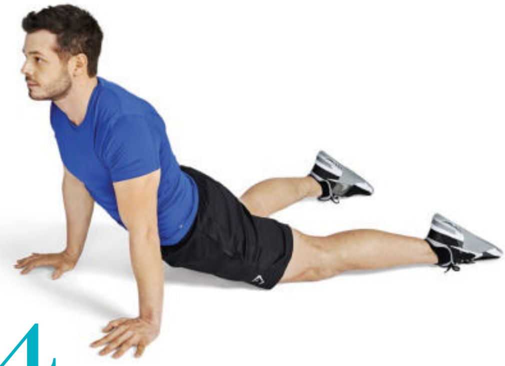
2

Spine Stretcher Put your feet together and push your butt back as far as you can, letting your thighs rest on your calves. As you do this, reach your hands in front of you as far as you can. You're in the yoga move called Child's pose, stretching the length of your spine. Hold for 2 deep breaths.



3

Forward Reach While continuing to push your butt back and reach your hands forward, lift your right hand and reach it upward. Then thread it under your left armpit, reaching as far through as you can. Let your eyes follow your right hand. Take 1 deep breath, then repeat on the other side. Return to Child's pose.



4

Upward Tilt Shift your torso forward so your belly is on the floor. Straighten your arms as much as you can, driving your chest up. Your hips may rise as you do this. Hold for 2 deep breaths, then shift back to child's pose. Repeat for 2 or 3 reps. Do 2 sets of the entire sequence

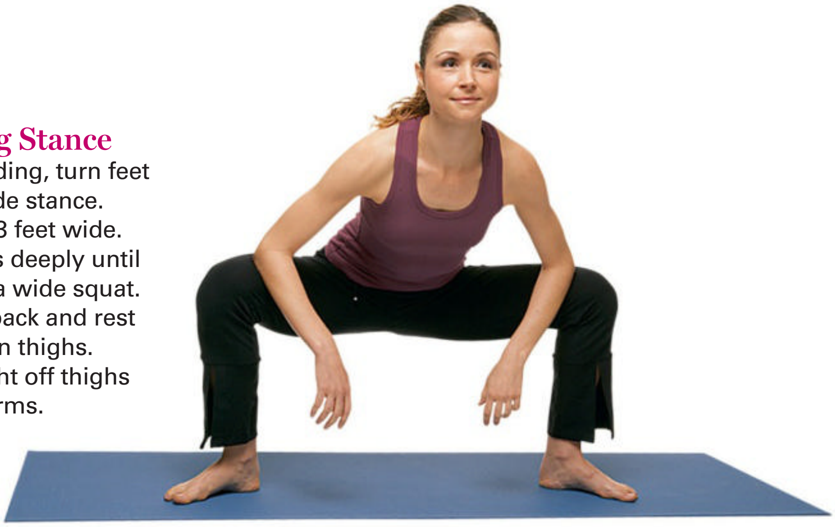
For Your Hips...

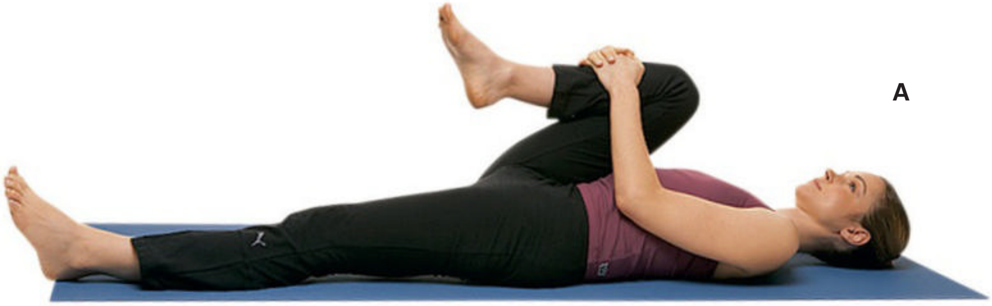
These three moves help with hip joint mobility, which means that after a long commute or meeting, you won't walk out hoping the circulation returns in the foot that fell asleep. Not to mention that you're also lowering your chances of a future hip replacement.

1

Open Leg Stance

While standing, turn feet out in a wide stance. Open legs 3 feet wide. Bend knees deeply until you are in a wide squat. Drop butt back and rest forearms on thighs. Bring weight off thighs and onto arms.



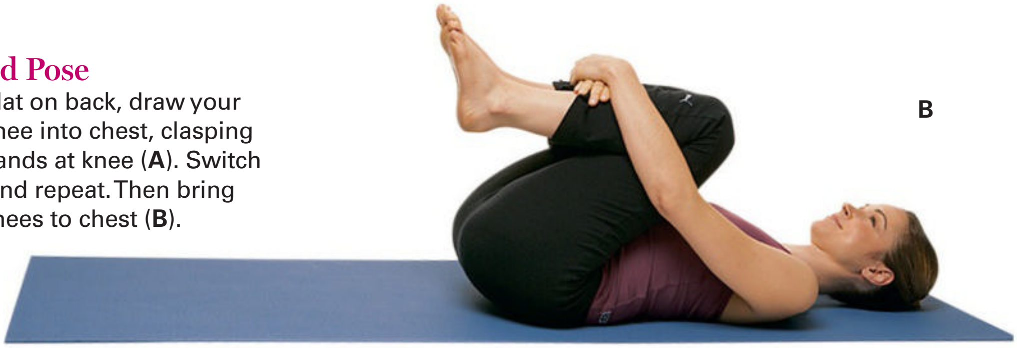


A

2

Folded Pose

Lying flat on back, draw your right knee into chest, clasping both hands at knee (**A**). Switch sides and repeat. Then bring both knees to chest (**B**).

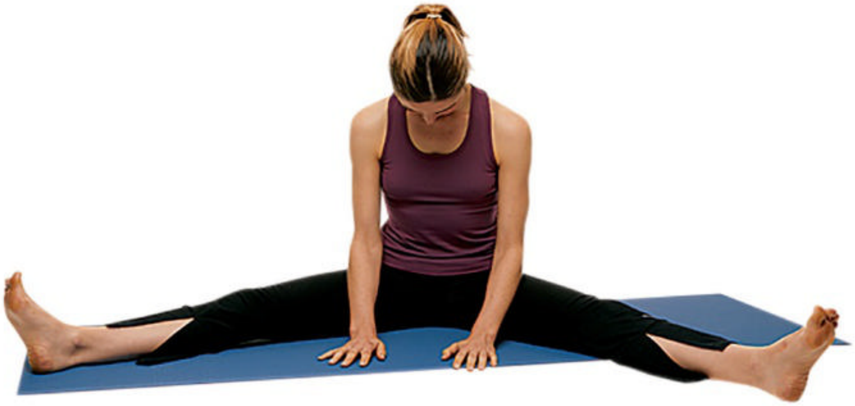


B

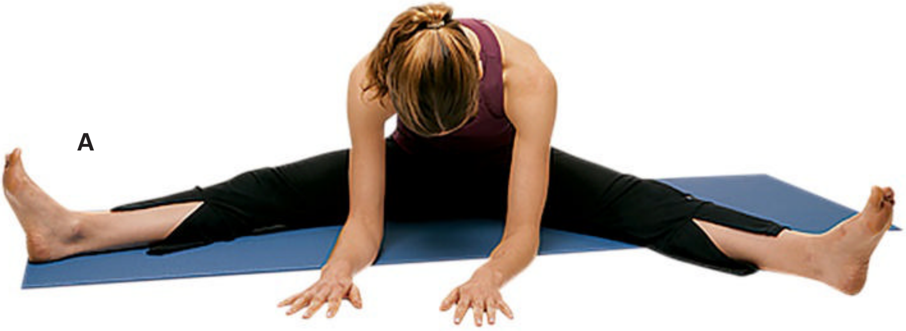
3

Open Leg Bend

Sit with legs 90 degrees apart or more. Lean forward (**A**). Try to touch hands on floor in front of you, gradually allowing elbows—before cheek follows suit—to rest on floor (**B**).



A



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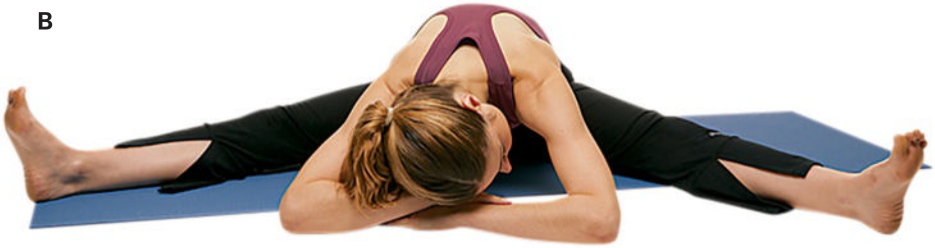
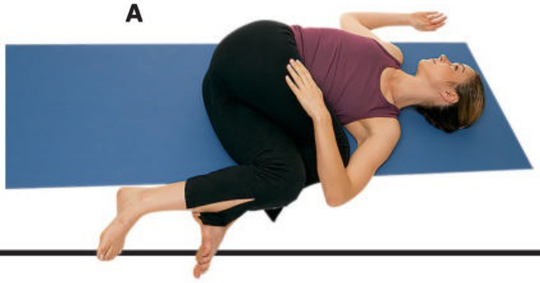


4

Spinal Twist

Lie on back, squeezing both knees to chest with ankles together. Cross right leg over left leg and drop both legs to left, holding top of right thigh with left hand. Draw knees up as close to chest as hip bones allow. Turn head and look right. Repeat on other side.

A



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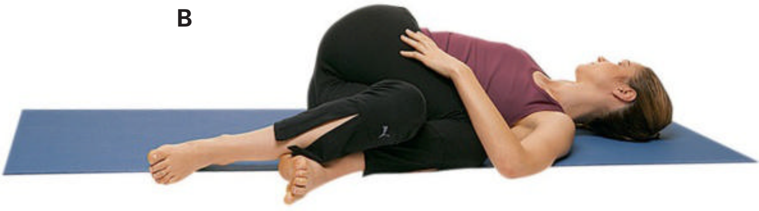
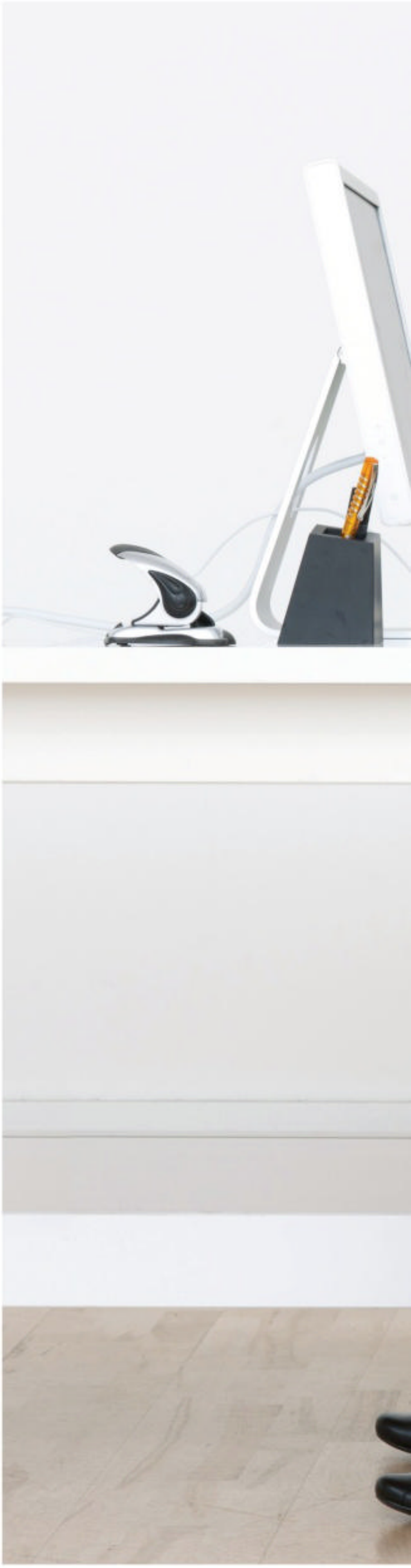


ARE YOU SITTING TOO MUCH?

Scientists say too much time spent sitting can have a negative effect on your body—and your overall health and longevity. Here's how to stand up for your life.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD AND BETH JAMES



Sitting Disease. It sounds like some mysterious condition you'd bring back from an exotic vacation, but it's actually a modern homegrown ailment caused by going from the breakfast table to the driver's seat, from your desk to the car to the sofa for the evening, with little movement otherwise.

The staggering amount of time many of us spend being sedentary—up to 15 hours a day if we work in an office, according to one study—can lead to problems inside and out. You're probably familiar with the aches and pains caused by hunching over a computer, but spending too much time in a chair or slumped on the sofa also has been linked to several life-threatening conditions, including blood clots, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, heart disease, and cancer. Not even your brain is spared: In 2018, researchers published a study that found an association between sedentary behavior and thinning of the regions of the brain that are critical to memory formation.

The issue with sitting goes beyond concern about obesity, although being overweight can increase the risk of many of the same conditions linked to sitting too much. And yes, clocking so many hours in your seat can make it harder to maintain a healthy weight: "When you're sitting, you're burning only half the calories you would standing or walking lightly," says David A. Alter, M.D., Ph.D., cardiologist and senior scientist at the UHN-Toronto Rehabilitation Institute.

But even if you're trim, a sedentary lifestyle may still wreak havoc on your health. That's because "lack of movement affects how we burn fat and metabolize sugar and the body's response to insulin," says Dr. Alter. Your cholesterol may also go up, along with markers of inflammation and troponins (a protein produced by cardiac muscle cells when they're hurt or dying). Such physiological changes can nearly double your odds of diabetes and increase your risk of cardiovascular disease by 14%.

In a small study last year, researchers took a group of healthy young adults who regularly clocked at least 10,000 steps a day and had them cut back to 1,500 steps. Participants still went to work and took care of their families, says Dan Cuthbertson, Ph.D., of the University of Liverpool's Life Course and Medical Sciences. It was no surprise that within two weeks, subjects increased total body fat, particularly around their middles, and lost muscle mass. But strikingly, the group also experienced a decrease in insulin sensitivity and an increase in both fat accumulated in the liver and triglycerides. Staying sedentary had consequences that were both swift and potentially serious in the long term. These changes were all reversible when participants resumed their normal activity regularly.

STEP RIGHT UP

Chairs are hardly a modern invention, but roughly 200 years ago, people sat for just five hours a day. The rest of their waking hours were filled with physical exertion: manually laundering clothes, kneading bread, walking places, working in the garden, you get the idea. If your great-great-great-great-great-great-grandma didn't swear by her spin class, it's as much because she was doing a low-key workout from sunup to sundown as due to the fact that

those classes didn't exist. Today, including eight hours of slumber at night, we may move as little as 60 minutes each day.

Were our ancestors cocooned from the perils of a sedentary lifestyle because they were moving more, or because they weren't sitting as much? That's hard to parse, says Dr. Alter. We do know that only 18.7% of American women meet the federal guidelines for physical activity (at least 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous cardio exercise each week).

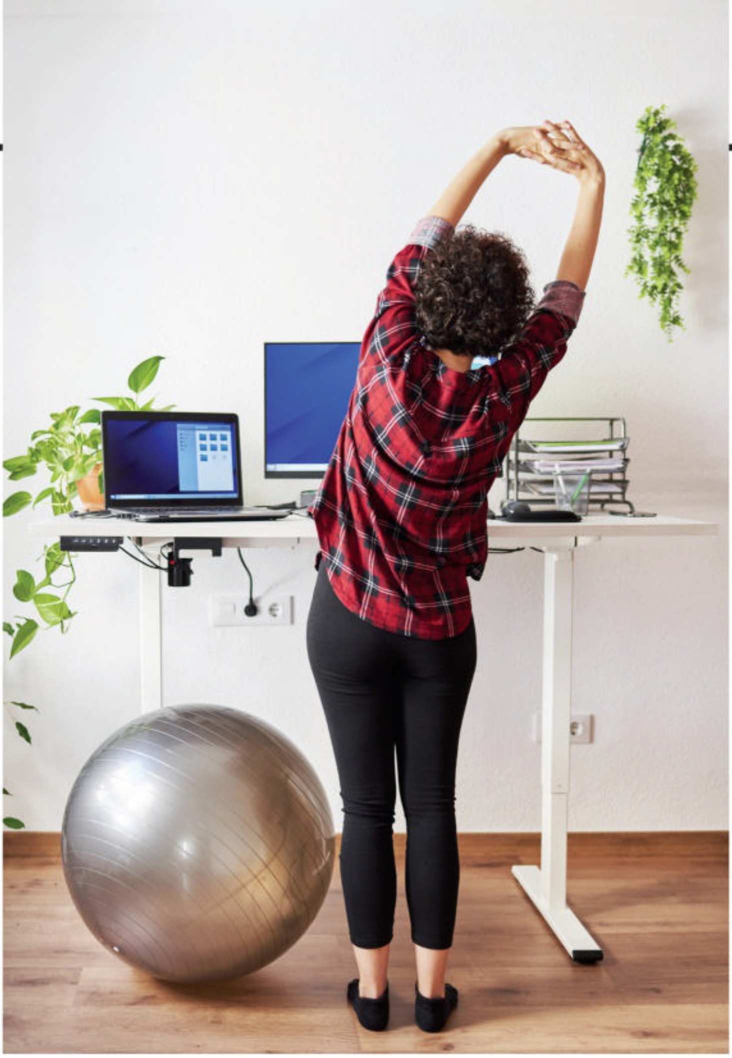
There's no question that hitting those targets can help your health and improve your longevity. But it may take more than double that amount of conscious exercise to offset the time you spend sitting: A study in *The Lancet* that analyzed data from more than 1 million adults found that it took 60 to 75 minutes of moderate cardio per day to wipe out sitting's higher risk of premature death. And even the most active participants saw an uptick in mortality risk when they sat in front of the TV for five or more hours a day.

That means exercise, while worthwhile, doesn't completely make up for sitting. When researchers strapped activity monitors on nearly 8,000 adults 45 and older, they found that sitting for 12 or more hours a day increased the odds of early death regardless of exercise habits. And the risk was especially high if chair time was in uninterrupted stretches of 60 to 90 minutes, says Keith Diaz, Ph.D., the study's lead author and an assistant professor of behavioral medicine at Columbia University. "It's simply not enough to be active or move at one specific time of the day," says Diaz. "We need to be mindful of moving frequently throughout the day in addition to exercising."

MIXING IN MOVEMENT

Before you quit your job or swap your washing machine for a washboard and a scrub brush, know this: Moving more doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing endeavor. You can have your modern life and conveniences without fear that you're harming your body. The main trick is to scale back both your sitting and how many consecutive minutes you spend in one seat. A study from King's College London showed that people who targeted their sitting time with a strategy—say, switching to a standing desk or walking to refill your water more often—were more effective in reducing their sedentariness than those who added more exercise sessions into their days.

So work on replacing at least two hours of tush time with movement breaks—a shift associated with all sorts of benefits, including 14% lower triglycerides, higher "good" HDL cholesterol, a trimmer waistline, and better glucose control, according to a study in the *European Heart Journal*. "Little breaks don't seem like much, but they add up," says Dr. Alter. In fact, two hours spread over the roughly 16 hours you're awake is about eight minutes an hour, and you can do those in spurts. One study found that walking two more minutes each hour can lowers a person's risk of premature death. You may be able to eliminate sitting entirely. Call friends on walks, prep dinner while standing at the counter, or pass up a seat on the bus. The fact that women who sat the most had more than twice the risk of a clot moving to their lungs compared with those who sat the least makes it easier to think of sitting as a last resort.



SIT SMARTER

Some of the symptoms of too much sitting have to do with the mechanics of how we sit. "Most of us tend to collapse into our seats so our shoulders roll forward and our back muscles get overstretched," says Rebecca Seguin-Fowler, Ph.D., an exercise physiologist and professor at Texas A&M University. In an ideal world, you'd sit with shoulders back and down, chin slightly tucked to keep your head in a neutral position. Your feet should be flat on the floor—not crossed or twisted under you—with your knees lower than your hips. "Proper alignment also helps you place the least amount of train on your muscles, ligaments, and bones," says Stacey Pierce-Talsma, D.O., of the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine. That means facing your TV (rather than craning your neck in one direction) and straightening up when you notice you're slumping. A few adjustments to your environment will also help, so move the computer closer to your chair and elevate it so your shoulders and spine aren't curling forward. In the car, adjust your seat height so that your knees are slightly bent and lower than your hips. A pillow or lumbar support can help thwart slouching and keep your lumbar spine slightly arched, says Pierce-Talsma. These small tweaks to the way you sit—plus finding ways to work in more non-exercise movement—can lead to huge benefits to your health. That deserves a standing ovation.

Your Body in a Chair

Sitting as much as many of us do increases our chance for some 35 serious conditions, likely because getting up and moving around is key for regulating proteins, genes, and other systems that lower our susceptibility to disease. Below, some of the effects of "sittingitis":

DEPRESSION & ANXIETY

The more you sit at work, the greater your risk, even if you exercise, a study in *Mental Health and Physical Activity* found. On the flip side, other research shows that the more people move throughout the day, the happier they are.

BACK & NECK PAIN

Just four hours of sitting can compress a key disc in your lower back, says Gregory Billy, M.D., associate professor of orthopedics and rehabilitation at Penn State University. Poor posture can also lead to disc problems in your neck.

CANCER

Risk of colon and endometrial cancer goes up even after accounting for exercise, possibly due to inflammation, weight gain, and other changes. One review in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* reports that for every additional two hours per day spent sitting, risk jumps 8% and 10% for colon cancer and endometrial cancer respectively.

OBESITY, DIABETES, & HEART TROUBLE

Yes, you burn fewer calories sitting, but also the hormone insulin's ability to move glucose out of blood and into cells may decline when you sit for long periods, Dr. Alter says. Cholesterol and markers of inflammation may go up; how you metabolize fat changes; and vascular function may be reduced.

WEAK BONES

Weight-bearing exercise, including standing and walking, stresses your skeleton in a good way, signaling specialized cells to replace old bone tissue with new. When you sit too much, the body replaces less of what it loses, leading to fragile bones and a greater risk of osteoporosis, especially as you get older.

BLOOD CLOTS

Slow blood flow in the legs from a sedentary lifestyle, possibly along with lower levels of clot-preventing proteins, increases your risk. Women who sat for more than 40 hours per week had more than double the risk of a clot moving to their lungs compared with those who sat less than 10 hours.

PART 3

How do I Start a Yoga Practice?

If you've felt intimidated to try it, don't be. If you're a devotee, there's even more to love.

FIND THE RIGHT STYLE FOR YOU

Yoga's rainbow of choices have you feeling intimidated? Here's how to choose a class that best complements your goals and mood.

BY LARA ROSENBAUM

Upward-Facing Dog

If the desire to be flexible has convinced you to give yoga a try, we're here to help you get off on the right foot. While any type of yoga can invigorate your body, calm your mind, and help you get in shape, certain styles may be a better fit for you (or your current mood) than others. "With the increasing number of choices in the yoga world, new students could definitely be overwhelmed," says Desiree Rumbaugh, a yoga instructor in Mexico. The good news is that the many options mean that you won't have to settle for a lackluster session or the same moves every week. Read on to determine the styles that are right for you.

Side Angle pose

You want to:
LIMBER UP AND RELAX
Pick: RESTORATIVE

With this style of yoga, props such as bolsters, blankets, and blocks support your body so you can feel a deep release. Poses are often held for as long as 15 minutes, and snoozing is completely acceptable. "Letting go physically encourages the mind to do the same," says Judith Hanson Lasater, Ph.D., author of *Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times*. "When we give the body support, that feeling can spill over into our emotional well-being," she says.

You want to:
BREAK A SWEAT WHILE YOU STRETCH
Pick: HOT YOGA

Pack water and a towel—most hot yoga studios have a tropical climate, with temperatures around 105°F with 40% humidity. "The heat promotes sweating and warms up the body, making your muscles more flexible," says Jennifer Lobo, co-owner of Bode NYC yoga studio in New York. These yoga sessions are set up roughly like a typical fitness class: a warm-up, 20 minutes of quick, heart-revving poses, followed by a cooldown. You might want to avoid this style if you're very sensitive to the heat, have high blood pressure or heart disease, or are nursing any injuries.

You want to:
DROP A FEW POUNDS WHILE YOU'RE AT IT
Pick: VINYASA FLOW

This calorie-burning workout will have you moving

Crow pose

continuously (but certainly not effortlessly) from pose to pose. Because each Vinyasa flow class is different (the pace, poses, and sequences vary), your muscles will constantly be challenged in new ways, which burns extra calories. And if you're a fan of fitness classes that double as jam sessions, note that many Vinyasa instructors play upbeat tunes during class. The only caveat: Regular classes move quickly. If you're a newbie, start with a beginner or "basics" class.

You want to:
BOOST YOUR SPIRITS
Pick: **ANUSARA**

This method unwinds your body while lifting your mood. Each class focuses on an inspirational idea (like feeling grounded or embodying confidence), which instructors refer to as a "heart theme." Expect some chanting and oms (feel free to speak up or sit quietly) and lots of classic moves such as lunges and planks. You'll probably partner up with a classmate for a pose or two to experience "the joy of community" and for stretching you wouldn't be able to do on your own.

You want to:
BUILD STRENGTH INSIDE AND OUT
Pick: **POWER YOGA**

This style may sound hardcore, but its name was actually inspired by the inner strength it develops. "Each session improves your posture and

SAFETY FIRST!

Just because it's not football doesn't mean you can't get hurt during your yoga practice. Here's how to avoid injuries.

Know the Teacher

If you have a previous or current injury, you shouldn't take a class with a teacher who doesn't have at least 500 hours of training. (Yes, it's OK to just ask them.)

Don't Be a Hero

Remember to strike a balance between effort and ease. Teachers don't judge you for resting or foregoing a difficult pose. Just keep showing up and you'll keep improving.

Watch Yourself

In the end, you're responsible for your own health and safety. This isn't a race, and it's your job to listen to your body.

creates more confidence, which breeds self-empowerment," says Rudy Mettia, a California-based yoga instructor. That's not to say your muscles get off scot-free. There's plenty of toning and lean muscle building for your core, legs, and glutes.

You want to: GIVE YOUR BRAIN (AND BODY) A WORKOUT

Pick: ASHTANGA

Yoga is not only concerned with what your body is doing. Mental strength and serenity are just as fundamental. A great example: Ashtanga yoga, one of the most popular styles in the yoga world. While it will help you build muscle and burn calories, the real reward comes from the dedication and consistency this practice requires (serious students often practice six days a week). During class, a teacher will walk you through a series with set postures that remain mostly the same from day to day. The whole practice is about breath, movement, and discipline, says Kathryn Budig, author of *Women's Health Big Book of Yoga*. Many of the postures in Ashtanga take time to master—which makes nailing them that much more rewarding.

You want to: FOCUS ON FORM

Pick: IYENGAR

Beginners can find comfort in the alignment-based Iyengar style—not because it's easy, but because it's taught in levels. Students work their way up through careful, focused instruction. "Iyengar assesses its teachers before they can be trained," says Bobby Clennell, author of *The Woman's Yoga Book*. "If they're not committed and prepared, they are advised to practice more and reapply." So breathe easy: Even if you have no clue what you're doing, your teacher will.

You want to: INCREASE YOUR SPIRITUALITY

PICK: KUNDALINI

If you want a spiritual workout in addition to a physical one, this style of yoga may be for you. Most kundalini instructors place emphasis on balancing the body's energy through breath, non-traditional movements, and eastern philosophy. Unlike many other yoga styles, these classes usually contain lots of philosophy, singing, and meditation.

Savasana

What You'll Need

While yoga is mainly practiced with only a mat, there are additional props you may want to have on hand to experiment with and deepen your practice. Almost any yoga studio will have these items on hand, so you don't need to pick them up right away. But you may choose to invest in them for your home practice or if you want to avoid the communal props at the studio. These yoga props can be ordered online at sites like gaiam.com and manduka.com; you often can also find good deals at your local T.J.Maxx or Marshalls.

YOGA BLOCKS

These come in foam, cork, and bamboo. They're often used to help you get into proper alignment and to go deeper in certain poses. They're a great tool for everyone from the beginner to the advanced yogi, and are especially helpful if you're not super flexible.

- Supporting the Bridge Pose
- Supporting a headstand
- Opening the chest
- Aiding flexibility in standing poses

YOGA STRAP

This is a long cloth strap with a buckle that allows it to form a small to large loop that helps you hold poses and keeps your muscles engaged.

- Lassoing the feet to help with bending areas of limited flexibility
- Performing restorative poses
- Deepening shoulder rotation in backbends
- Supporting the shoulders in inversions

BOLSTER

Having one of these is like having a huge, fluffy teddy bear around. The bolster is a great companion for restorative poses and acts as a "safety pillow" when working on transitional poses in which your head goes toward the floor.

- Supporting the lower back
- Doing restorative poses
- Aiding confidence during moves

BLANKETS (One or Two)

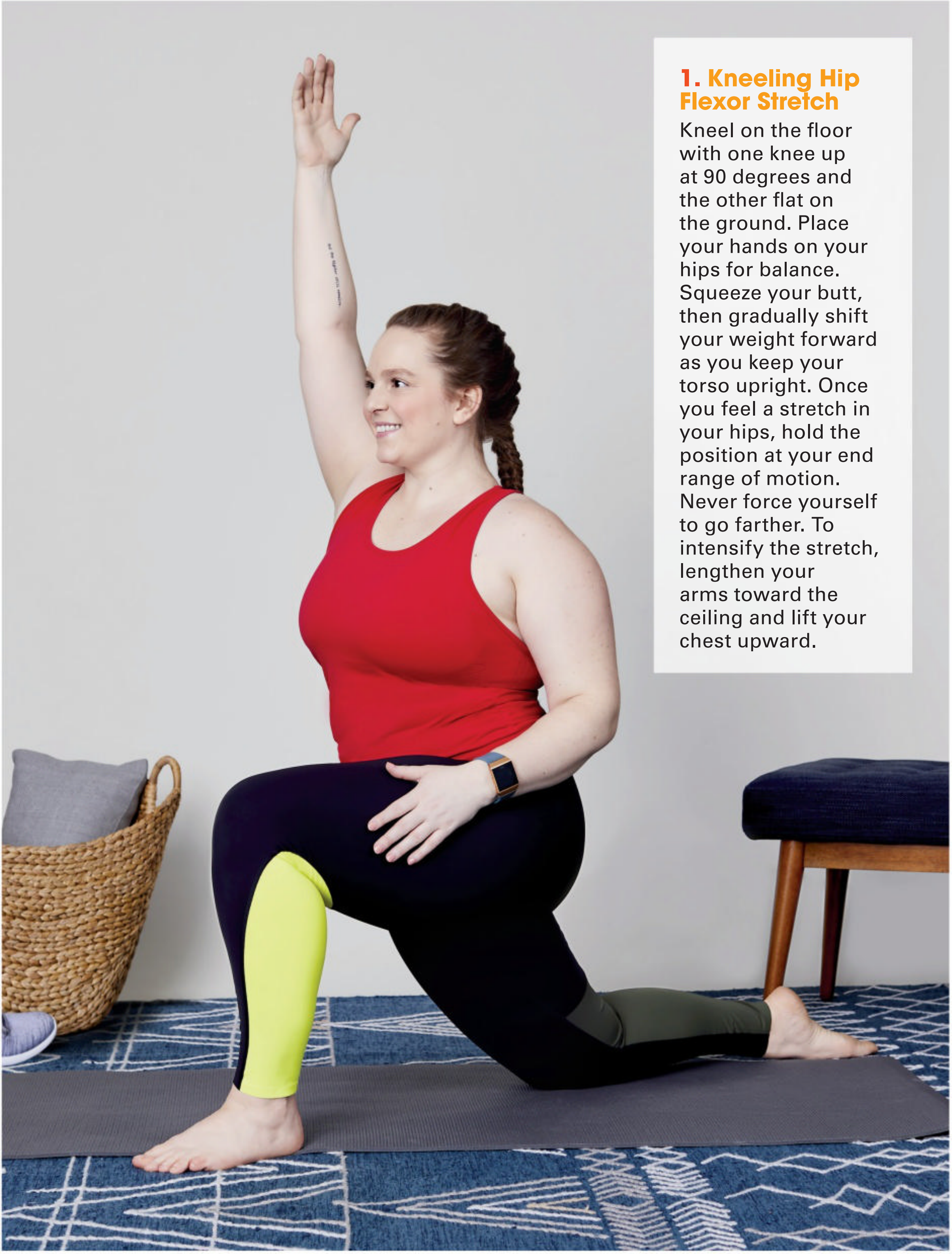
Blankets are used similarly to bolsters, but give you more variety. You can change the width, height, and thickness depending on how you fold them.

- Supporting the lower back
- Supporting a shoulder stand
- Doing ab work on a hardwood floor
- Performing Savasana (where you lie flat on your back to relax and recover)

YOUR 7-DAY YOGA STARTER GUIDE

If you haven't settled in on your ideal yoga style just yet, here's how to kick-start your practice. To get you going, certified personal Trainer Kymberly Nolden created this challenge: Do just one every day for a week—you'll be hooked on how great you feel.

BY ADELE JACKSON-GIBSON

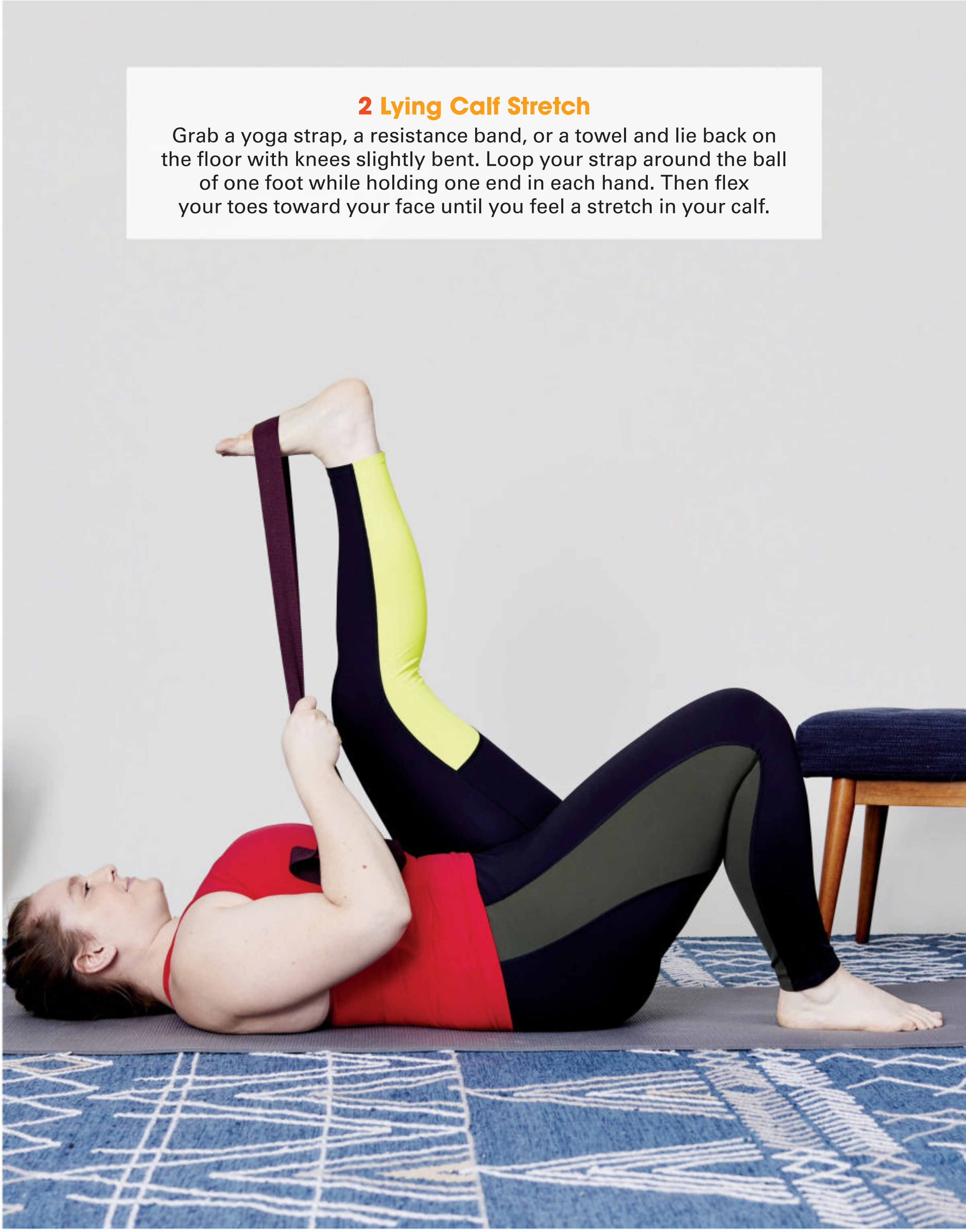


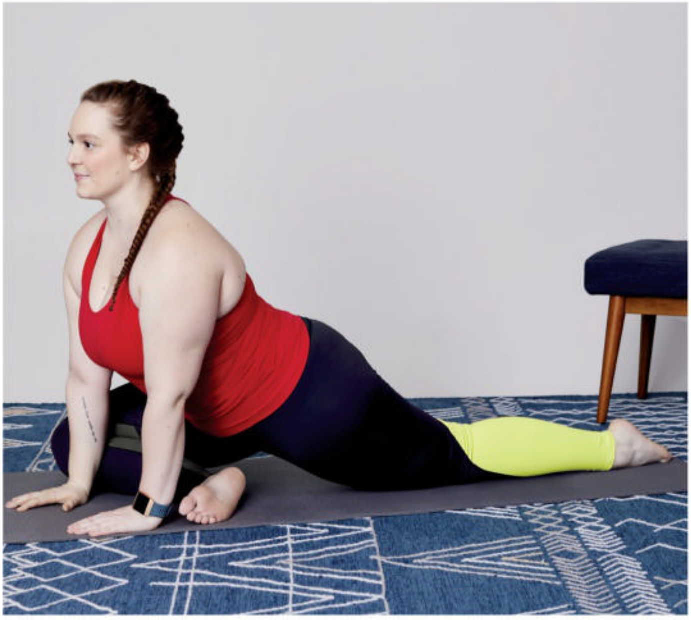
1. Kneeling Hip Flexor Stretch

Kneel on the floor with one knee up at 90 degrees and the other flat on the ground. Place your hands on your hips for balance. Squeeze your butt, then gradually shift your weight forward as you keep your torso upright. Once you feel a stretch in your hips, hold the position at your end range of motion. Never force yourself to go farther. To intensify the stretch, lengthen your arms toward the ceiling and lift your chest upward.

2 Lying Calf Stretch

Grab a yoga strap, a resistance band, or a towel and lie back on the floor with knees slightly bent. Loop your strap around the ball of one foot while holding one end in each hand. Then flex your toes toward your face until you feel a stretch in your calf.





3 Pigeon Pose

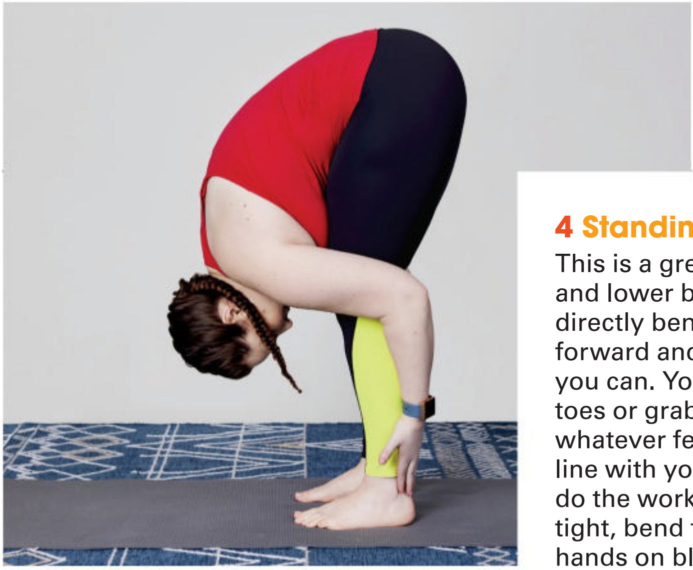
Start in a tabletop position with your hands and knees on the floor, keeping your knees beneath your hips. Bring your left leg behind you, then bring your right as close as possible to parallel with the front of your mat. Begin to sit onto your right hip as you lengthen your left leg and hold for some incredible hip-opening action. If the stretch feels too intense, support your right hip with a pillow or a folded blanket. Breathe. Make sure to stretch both sides.

How long should you stay in a stretch?

Good question, says Nolden. It depends on what your goal is:

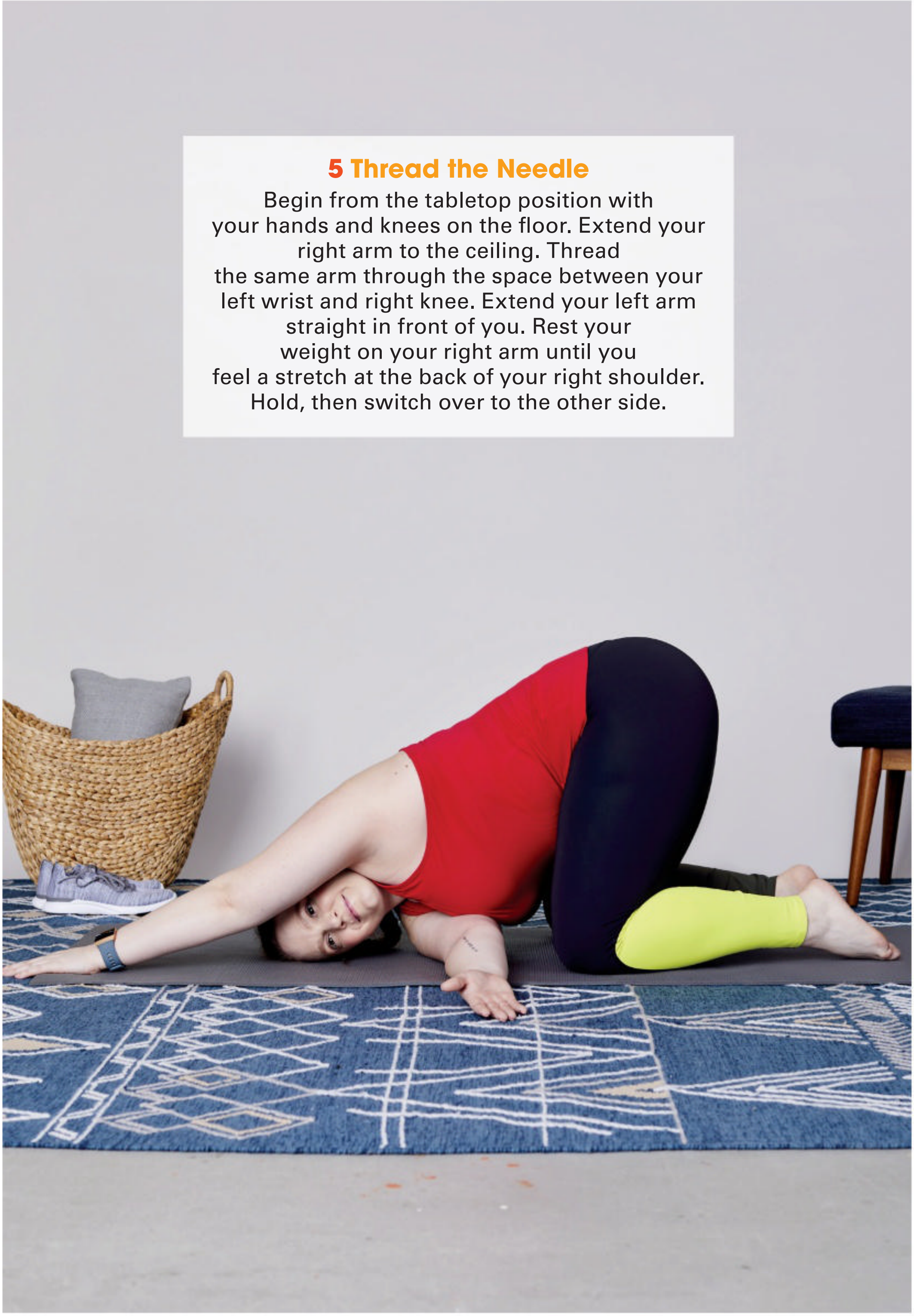
To wake up or prep for a workout: In this case, do dynamic stretching, which means you don't hold the stretch in one position for more than 30 seconds. Oscillate between the start and end positions, and move around in the stretch. Active stretches like these help to get the blood flowing and warm up the muscles.

To get more flexible and increase your range of motion, hold stretches from two to five minutes. These should be done when you're already warm, are not about to exert yourself further, and have some time to relax. The best times include right after a workout, right before bed, or after a hot shower.



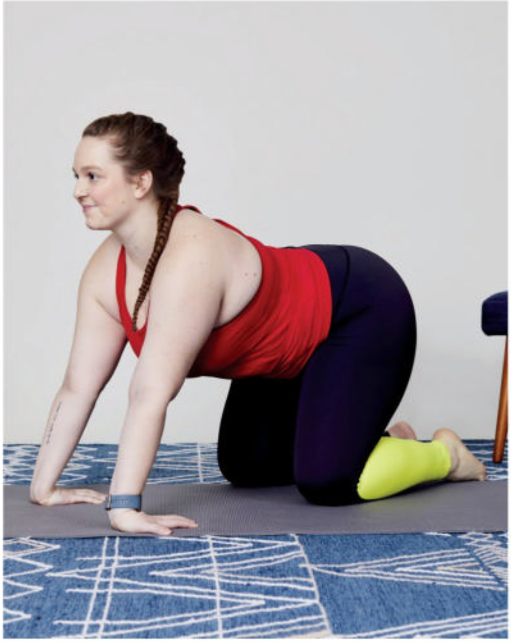
4 Standing Forward Fold

This is a great stretch for your hamstrings and lower back. Stand tall with your feet directly beneath your hips. Then bend forward and reach your hands as far as you can. You can touch the floor or your toes or grab the backs of your calves, whatever feels good. Keep your neck in line with your spine, relax, and let gravity do the work. If you're feeling particularly tight, bend those knees and place your hands on blocks or a chair.



5 Thread the Needle

Begin from the tabletop position with your hands and knees on the floor. Extend your right arm to the ceiling. Thread the same arm through the space between your left wrist and right knee. Extend your left arm straight in front of you. Rest your weight on your right arm until you feel a stretch at the back of your right shoulder. Hold, then switch over to the other side.

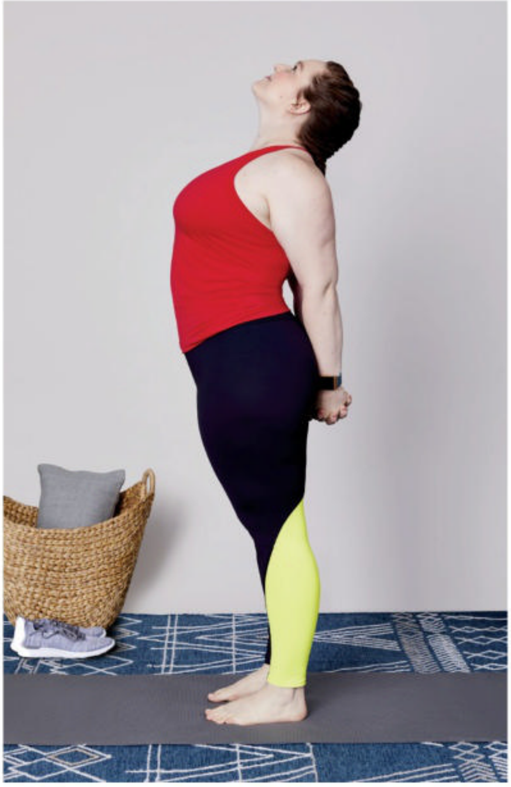


6 Kneeling Wrist Stretches

Begin on the floor with your hands under your shoulders and your knees beneath your hips. With palms down and fingers facing away from you, lean forward as your palms remain glued to the ground. Reach a challenging point in your range of motion and hold. To stretch your wrists from a different angle, point your fingers toward your body and sit back toward your heels as your palms remain on the ground. Hold again for your chosen length of time.

7 Standing Back Arch

Stand tall with your feet flat on the floor, then clasp your hands behind your back. Look toward the ceiling and raise your chest toward the sky as you pinch your shoulder blades together. Feel the stretch in your pecs and the fronts of your shoulders.



FOR THE BEST STRETCH

1 Meet or beat your time. To get better at holding stretches, make the clock your accountability partner, says Nolden. If you can comfortably hold a stretch for 30 seconds, for instance, try for five more seconds the next time.

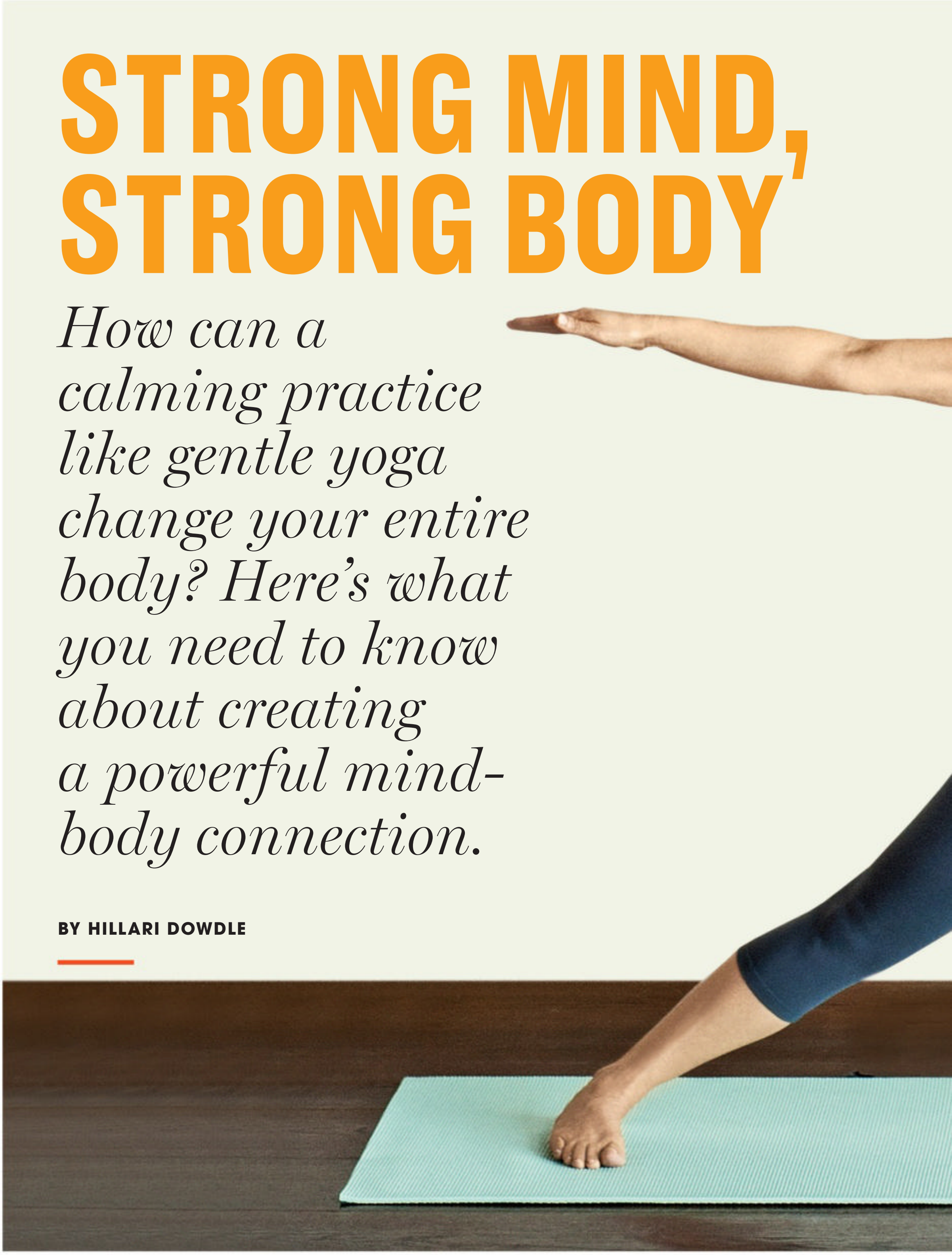
2 Use your breath to help your body relax. At the start, inhale for eight seconds, and as you deepen into the stretch, exhale for eight. This will help you move through the body's stretch reflex, which is telling you "Don't pass go." A little discomfort is probably OK, but if you feel pain, stop, Nolden says. Keep calm and breathe.

3 Don't lock your joints. Depending on your range of motion, you can bend your knees in order to flex your hips more for a better stretch. Then over time you can work on straightening your knees. That's not cheating—it's maximizing the stretch in your hamstrings.

STRONG MIND, STRONG BODY

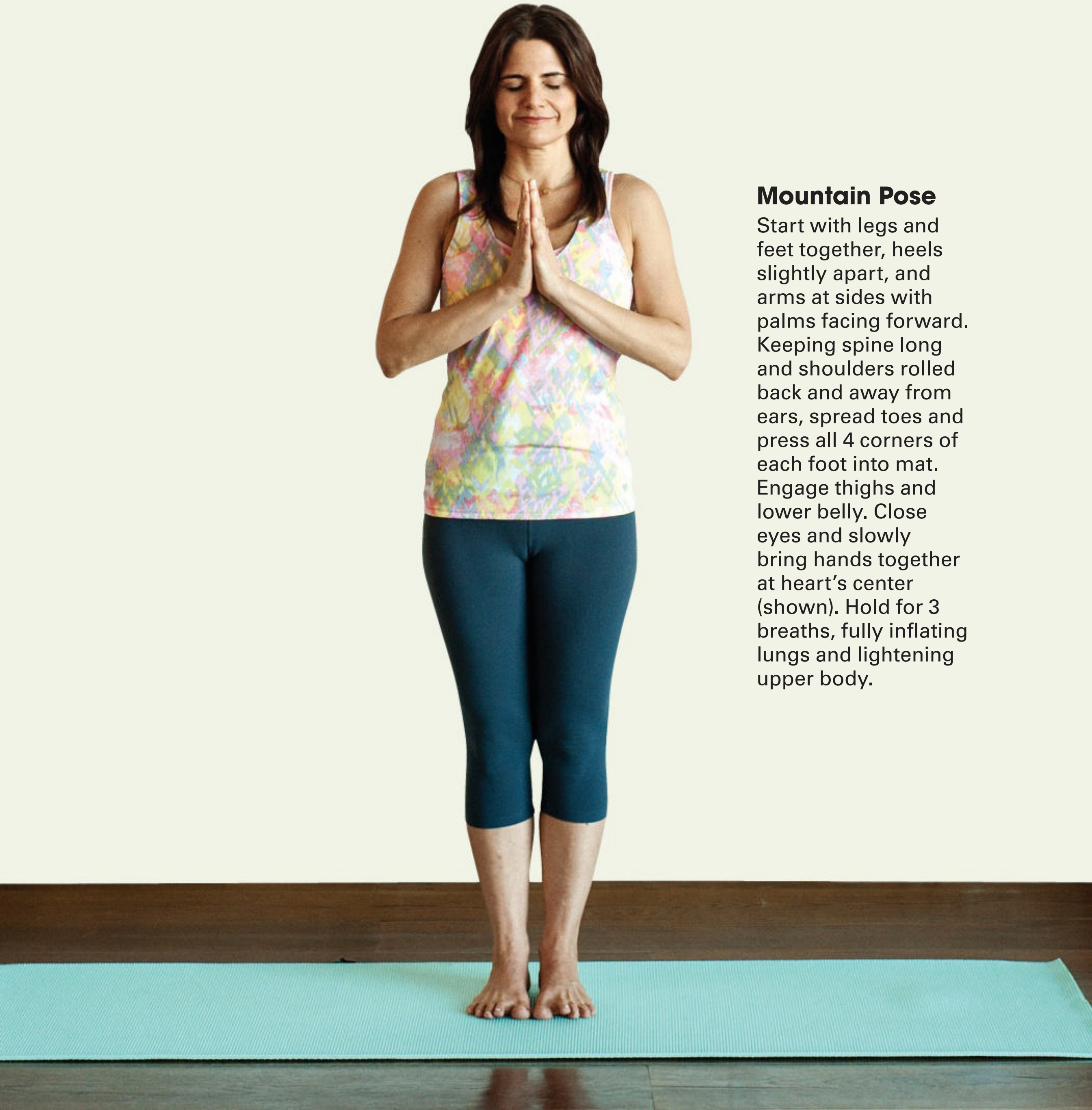
How can a calming practice like gentle yoga change your entire body? Here's what you need to know about creating a powerful mind-body connection.

BY HILLARI DOWDLE

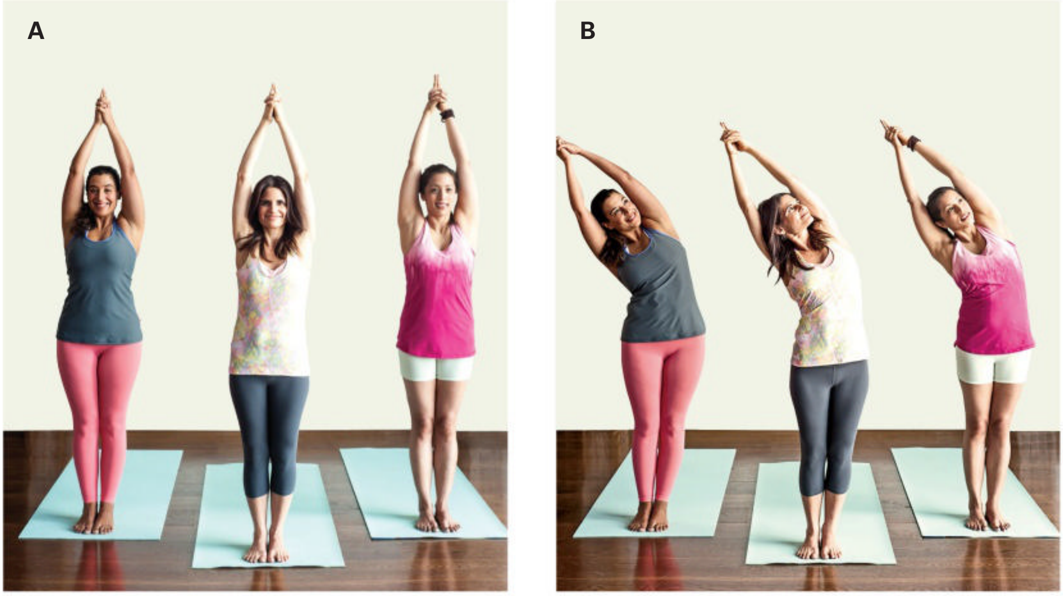


Your (Gentle) Wake-Up Call

We rise in the morning with the best of intentions, but without actually setting an intention, it can be hard to stick with even the simplest plan. This 10-minute series, created by yoga teacher Jillian Pransky, helps you get laser-focused on your own breath—something you can go back to (instead of that bag of salty chips) no matter how hairy things get. "The breath can lead you back to this state of ease where good decisions come naturally," says Pransky. All you need is a yoga mat and two yoga blocks. (If you don't have yoga blocks, you can try improvising with a couple of stacks of books or rolled-up towels or blankets.)

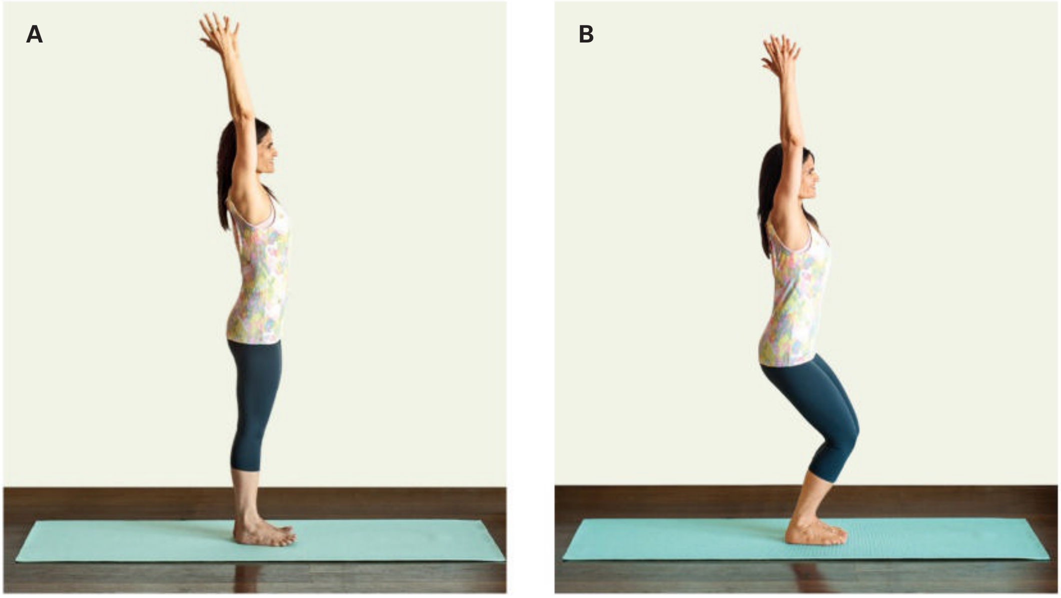


Mountain Pose
Start with legs and feet together, heels slightly apart, and arms at sides with palms facing forward. Keeping spine long and shoulders rolled back and away from ears, spread toes and press all 4 corners of each foot into mat. Engage thighs and lower belly. Close eyes and slowly bring hands together at heart's center (shown). Hold for 3 breaths, fully inflating lungs and lightening upper body.



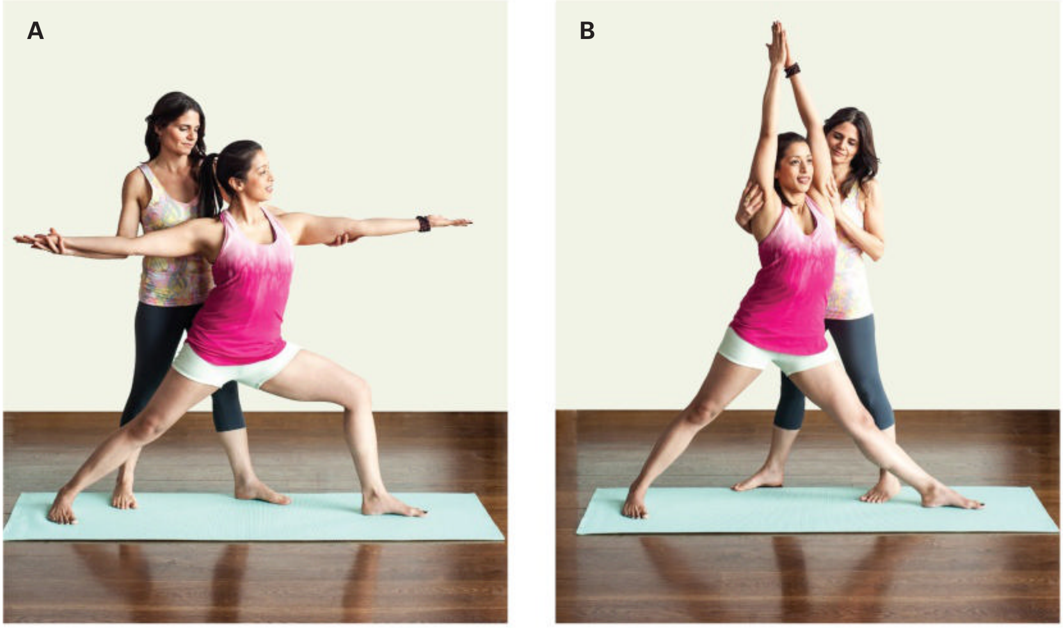
Standing Side Lean

Sweep arms overhead and interlace fingers, except index and thumb (**A**). Gently squeeze arms toward ears. On an inhalation, press feet down, engage thighs, and stretch up and evenly over to right (**B**). On an exhalation, gather belly into back, press feet down, and return to center. Repeat on left side. Do each side 4 times, then return to Mountain Pose.



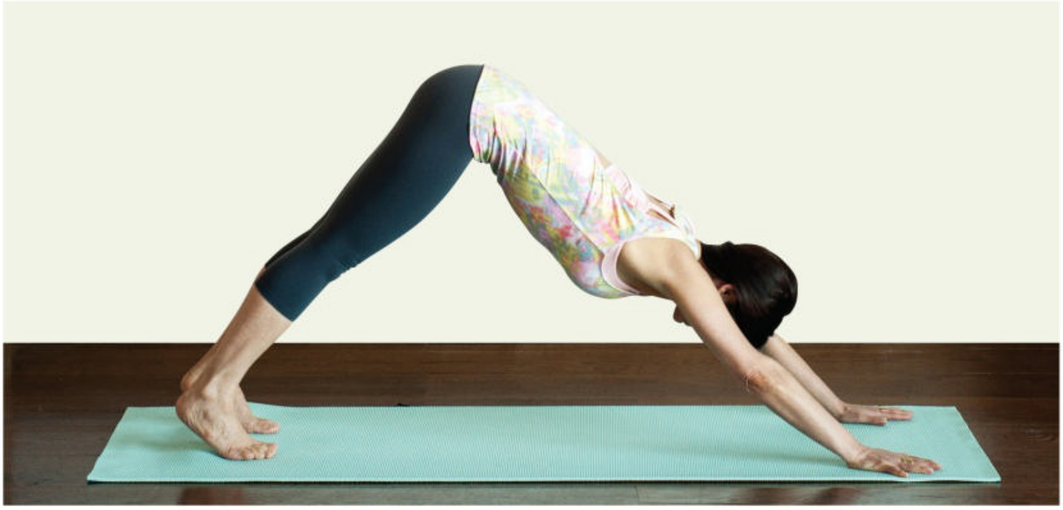
Mountain Pose–Chair Pose Flow

Inhale and sweep arms up to sky, biceps alongside ears (**A**). On an exhalation, sweep arms down and behind body, bending knees and lowering hips. Inhale and reach arms overhead, biceps by ears with palms turned toward each other, arriving in Chair Pose (**B**). On an exhalation, return to start. Repeat at least 10 times.



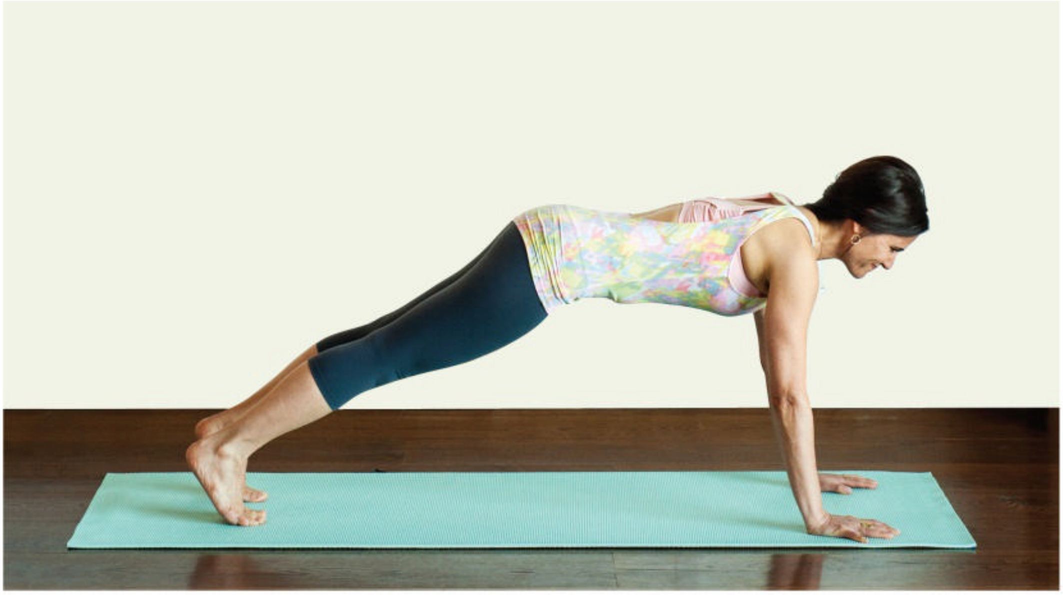
Warrior II Flow

Extend arms out to sides at shoulder height and step feet apart so they're directly under wrists, outer edge of back foot parallel to back of mat and toes of front foot pointing forward. Bend front knee, lining it up over front ankle, and come into Warrior II with palms up (**A**). On an inhalation, straighten front leg and sweep arms overhead, bringing palms together (**B**). On an exhalation, return to Warrior II. Repeat 10 times. Switch legs and repeat.



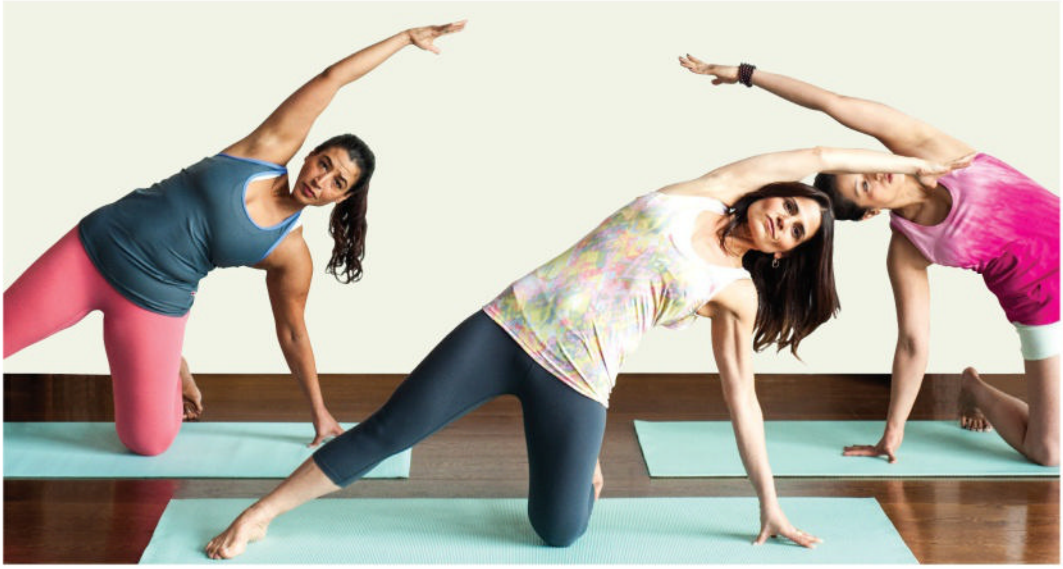
Downward-Facing Dog

Begin on all fours, knees hip-width apart and hands slightly more than shoulder-width apart. Curl toes into mat. Push down into hands and toes, then pull belly in and lift hips to sky, straightening legs to come into Downward-Facing Dog (shown). Spread toes and actively lift heels to come onto balls of feet. Press down strongly through palms and balls of feet and draw belly in toward spine. Hold for at least 5 breaths.



Downward-Facing Dog–Plank Flow

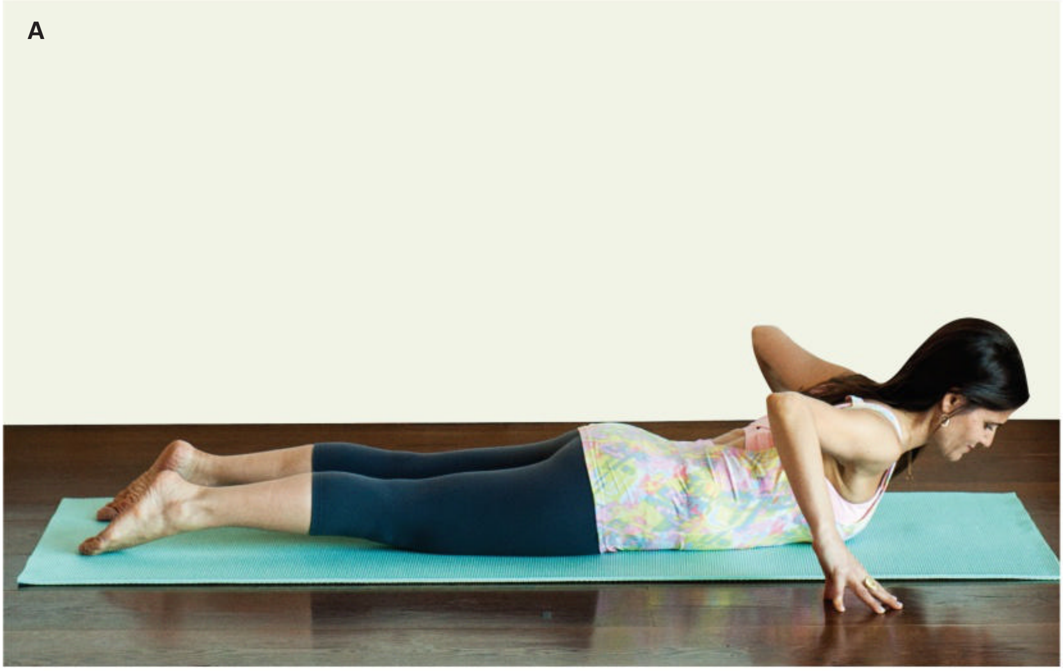
From Downward-Facing Dog, inhale and pull torso forward, coming into Plank Pose (shown). Lengthen spine and press heels to back wall, engaging thighs. On an exhalation, push down into balls of feet and hands, pulling belly to spine and lifting hips back into Downward-Facing Dog. Moving with breath, flow between Downward-Facing Dog and Plank 5 to 10 times.



Modified Side Plank

From Plank Pose, lower left knee to mat, bringing ball of left foot to floor and keeping right leg extended. Turn torso to right, bringing weight onto left fingertips and side of right foot. Lift hips and sweep right arm overhead, bringing biceps by right cheek with palm facing down (shown). Hold for 5 to 10 breaths. Repeat on opposite side.

A



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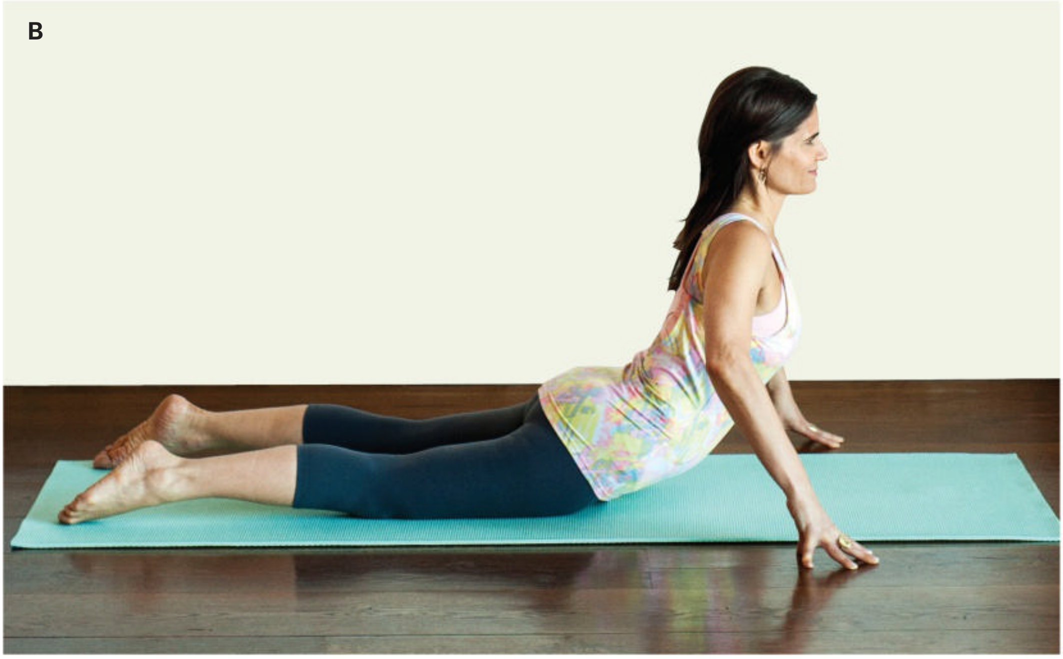


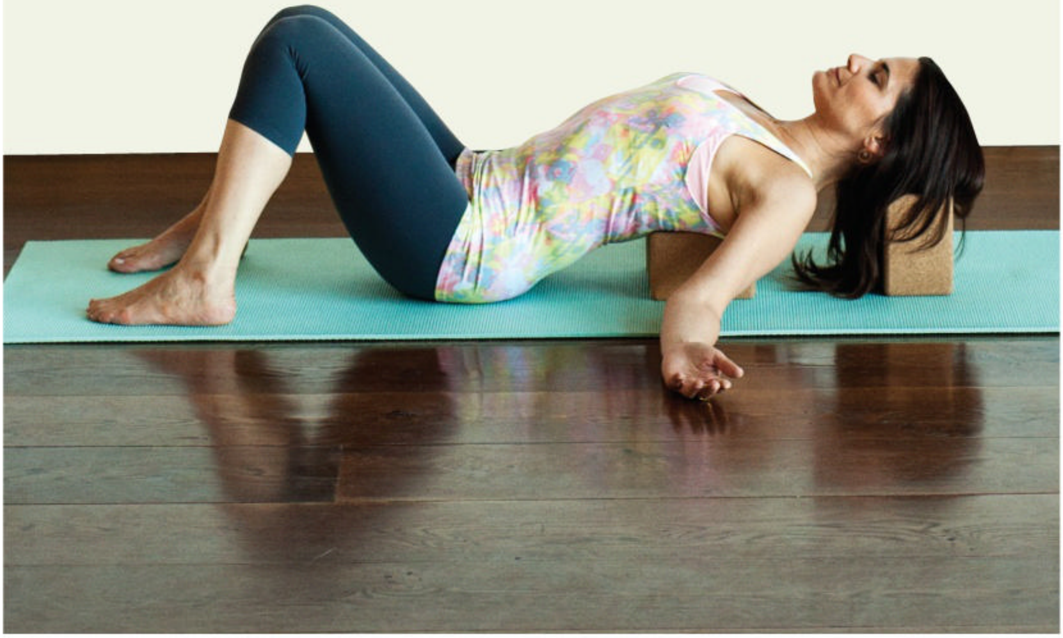
Wide-Arm Cobra

Lie facedown on mat. Place palms slightly more than mat-width apart and in line with breastbone, elbows bent. Come onto fingertips and point elbows toward sky and out to sides (**A**). Press pelvis, toes, and fingertips into floor. On an inhalation, reach through crown of head, keeping spine long, and straighten arms slightly, lifting chest off mat (**B**). Hold for 10 breaths.

Chest Opener

Lie faceup on mat with knees bent and feet hip-width apart, a yoga block beneath head and another placed lengthwise between shoulder blades. Allow knees to fall together. Bring arms out to sides, feeling opening through chest. Release body weight onto blocks, allowing chest to expand with each breath (shown). Rest here at least 2 minutes.

**TIP:
Make your stack of pillows, blankets, or blocks high enough so that your head is higher than your heart.**



PART 4

Which Other Stretching Workouts Can I Try?

Yoga gets a lot of attention, but there are many types of exercise that improve flexibility and strength.

EASYGOING STRETCHES FOR SLOW-MOVING DAYS

On mornings when your bed seems much more appealing than the gym, you can still squeeze in an effective flexibility routine.

WORKOUT BY PILATES INSTRUCTOR KRISTI ANDERSON

Not every morning leaves you feeling like springing straight out of the bed, but that doesn't mean you can't get moving anyway. "It's really simple to work out your entire body, no matter where you are," says Pilates instructor Erika Bloom. These gentle moves target a wide variety of muscle groups, to help you get in a little toning when you wake up or before you conk out. *Bonus:* The only workout gear you need is your pillow.

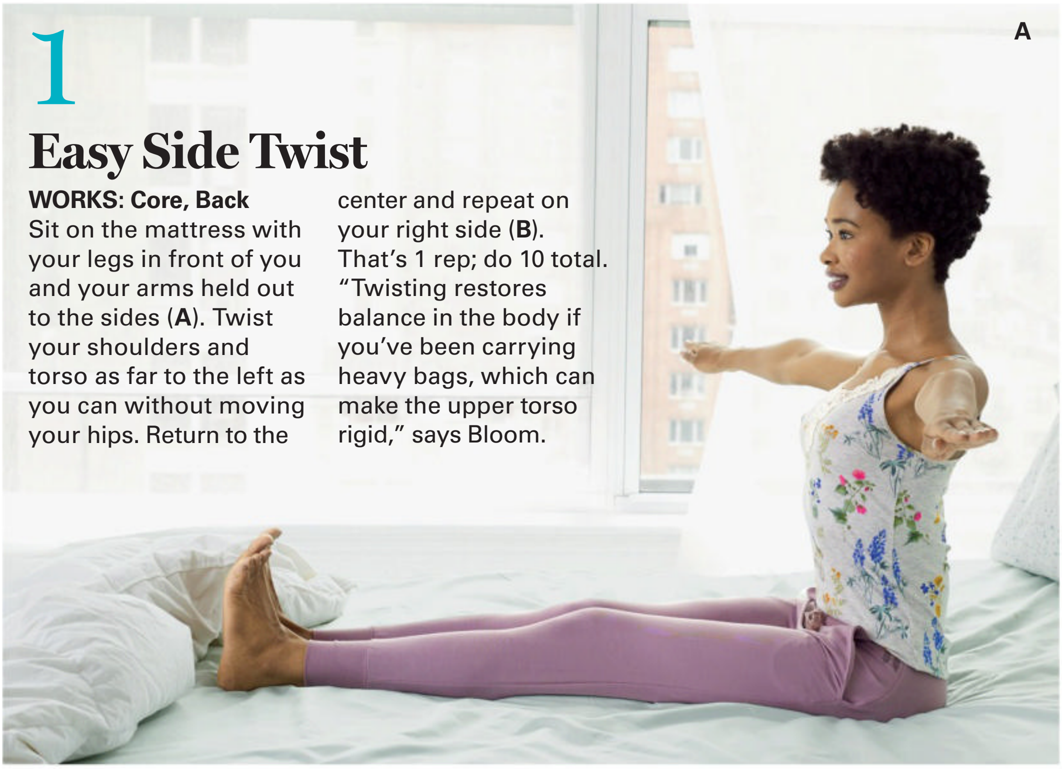
HAVE A BETTER WORKOUT

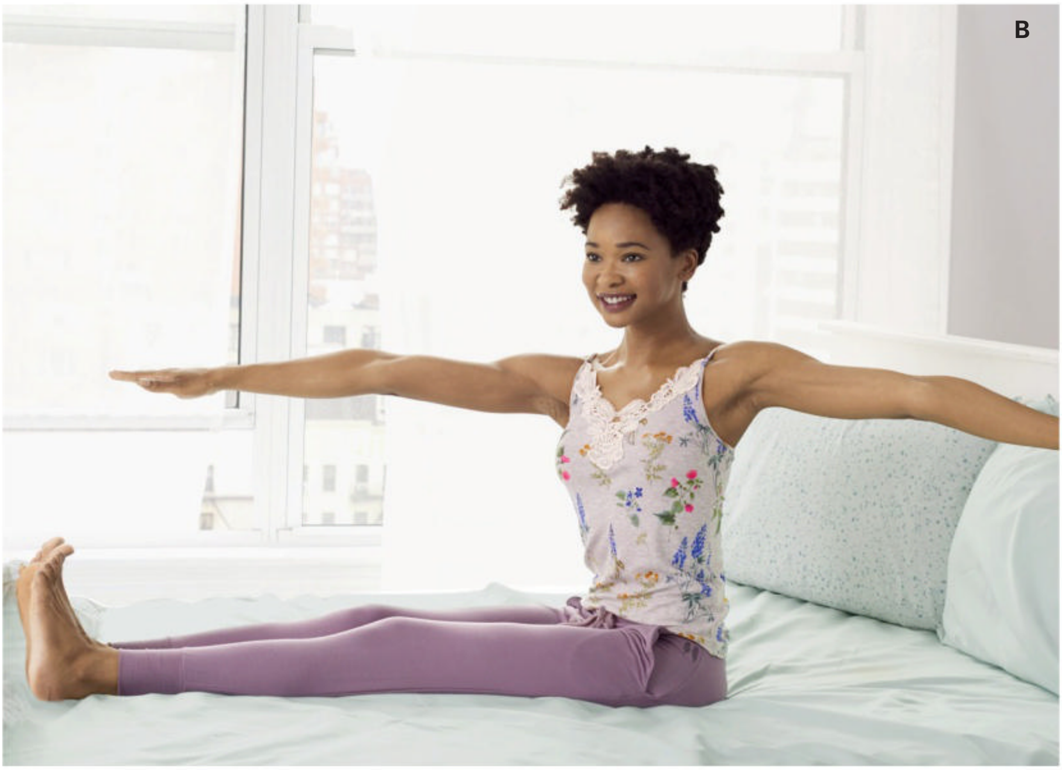
These moves aren't just about being comfy (although, let's face it, that's a major perk). When you do toning exercises on a soft surface, like a mattress, it forces your muscles to work even harder for balance and stability.

1

Easy Side Twist

WORKS: Core, Back
Sit on the mattress with your legs in front of you and your arms held out to the sides (**A**). Twist your shoulders and torso as far to the left as you can without moving your hips. Return to the center and repeat on your right side (**B**). That's 1 rep; do 10 total. "Twisting restores balance in the body if you've been carrying heavy bags, which can make the upper torso rigid," says Bloom.





> “This move opens up all the muscles in the front of the hip that are shortened from sitting.”

2

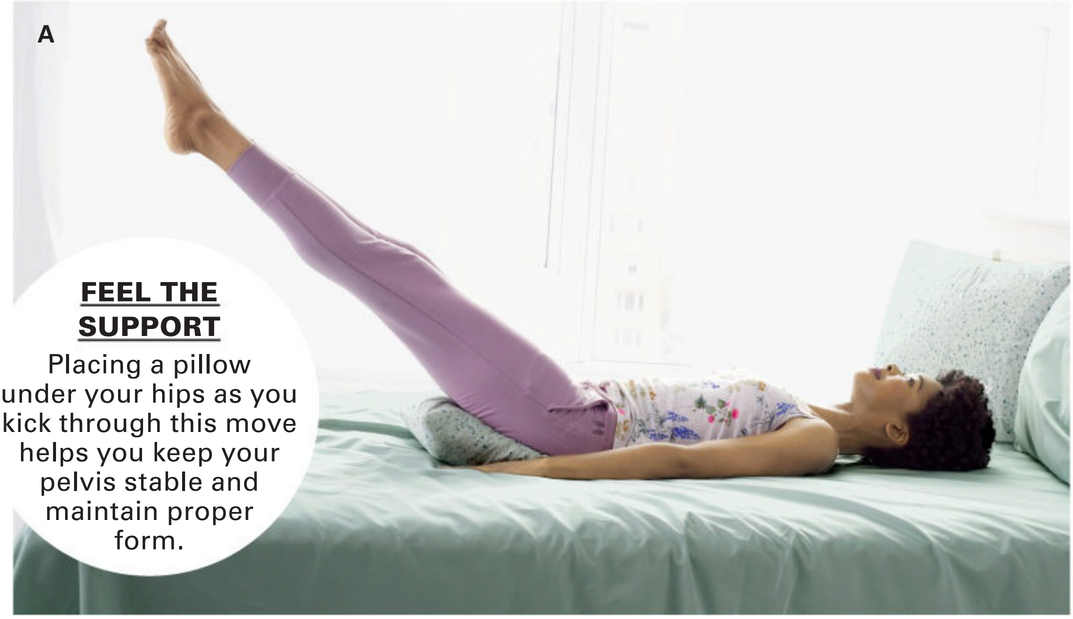
Butt and Thigh Toner

WORKS: Glutes, Hamstrings Lie facedown and bend your right leg so your toes are pointed upward. While pressing your hips into the mattress, lift your right thigh up a few inches, then lower without letting your thigh touch the bed. Do 10 reps, then repeat on the opposite side. “This toning exercise is amazing for someone who sits at a desk or drives a lot during the day,” says Bloom. “It opens up all the muscles in the front of the hip that are shortened from sitting.”

3

Flutter Kick

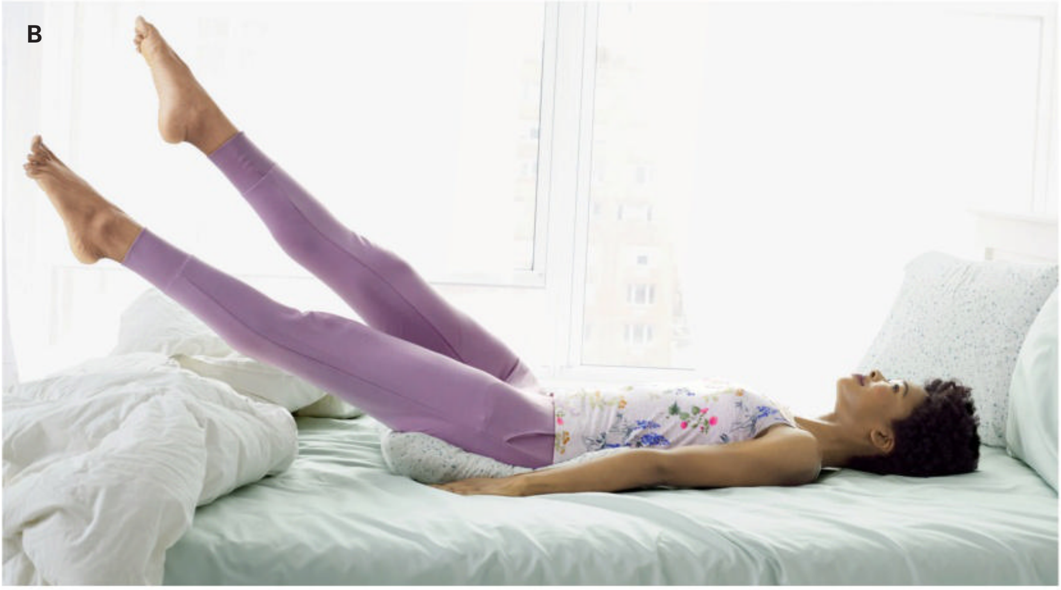
WORKS: Abs “With this exercise, you target deep abdominal muscles, which draw the belly in and up for a flatter, stronger stomach,” says Bloom. Lie faceup with a pillow under your hips and raise both legs, as shown (**A**). (The lower you hold them, the more you work your abs.) Focus on keeping your back in a neutral position. Kick feet up and down slowly in a scissors-type motion, as shown, without letting your heels touch the mattress (**B**). Do 20 kicks.



A

FEEL THE SUPPORT

Placing a pillow under your hips as you kick through this move helps you keep your pelvis stable and maintain proper form.



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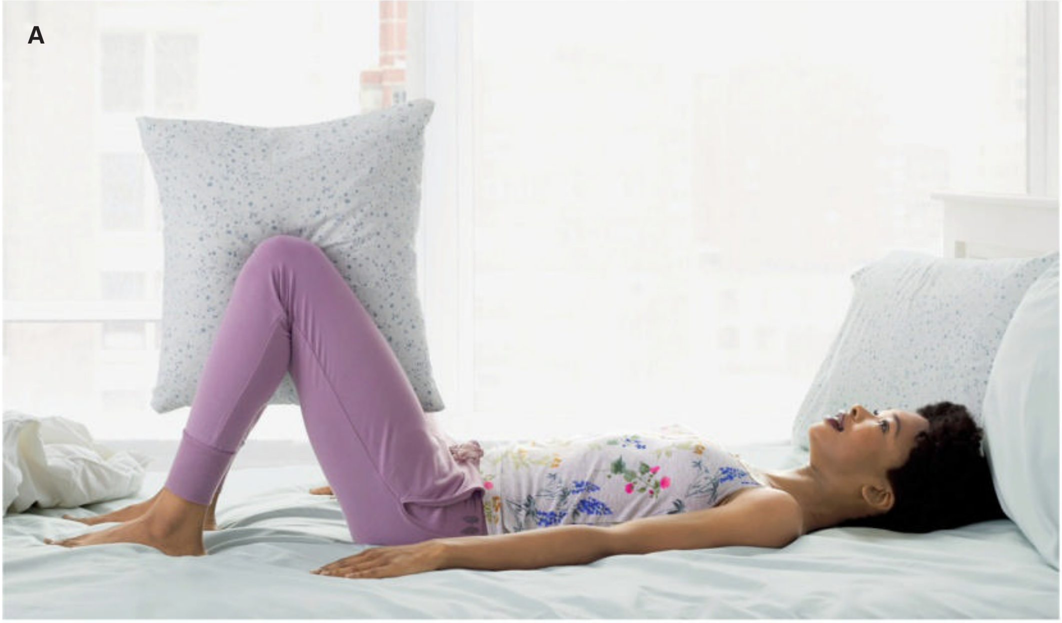
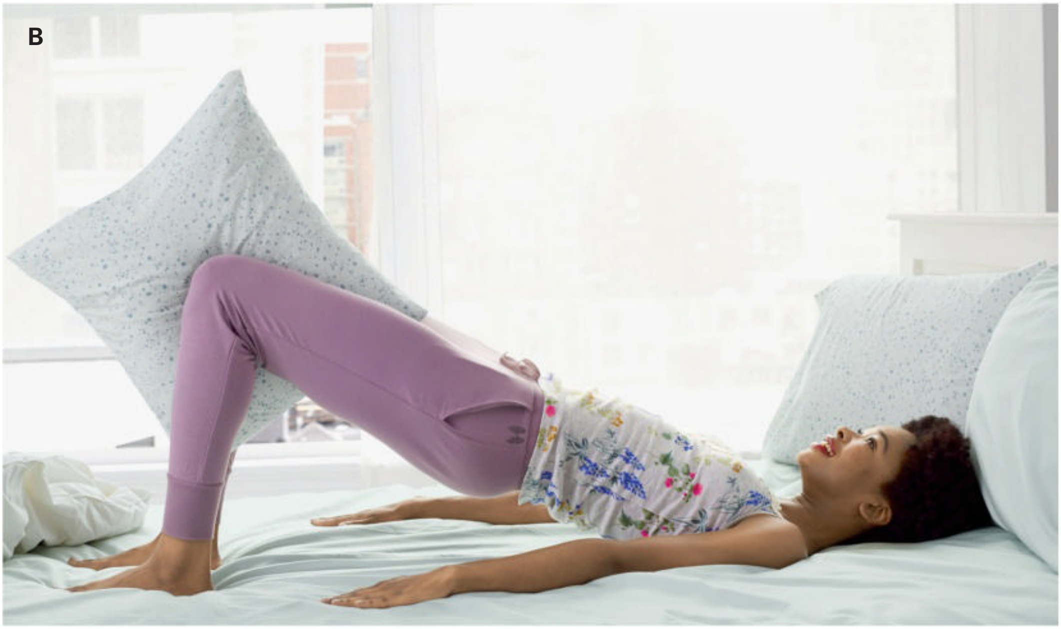
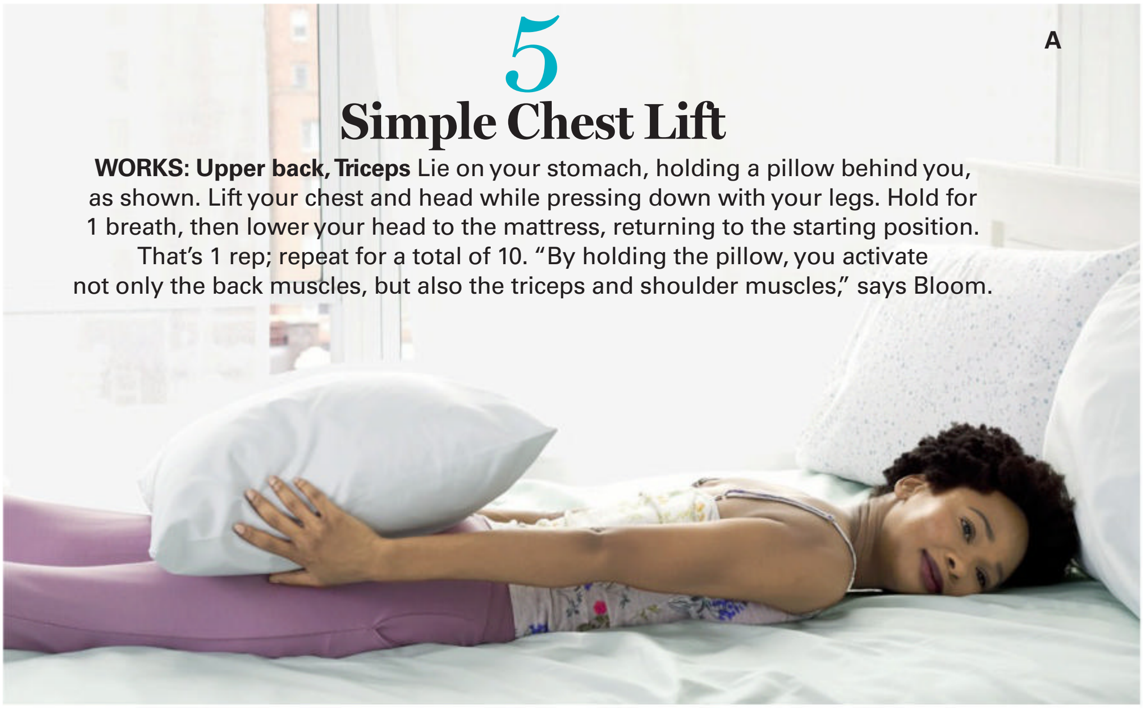




4

Hip Raise

Works: Glutes, Hamstrings, Back, Abs Lie faceup with legs bent and a pillow between your knees. “Holding a pillow this way helps keep your legs aligned,” says Bloom.Your feet should be flat on the bed and your arms by your sides, as shown. Slowly lift your hips so your body forms a straight line, then lower. That’s 1 rep; do 10 total.



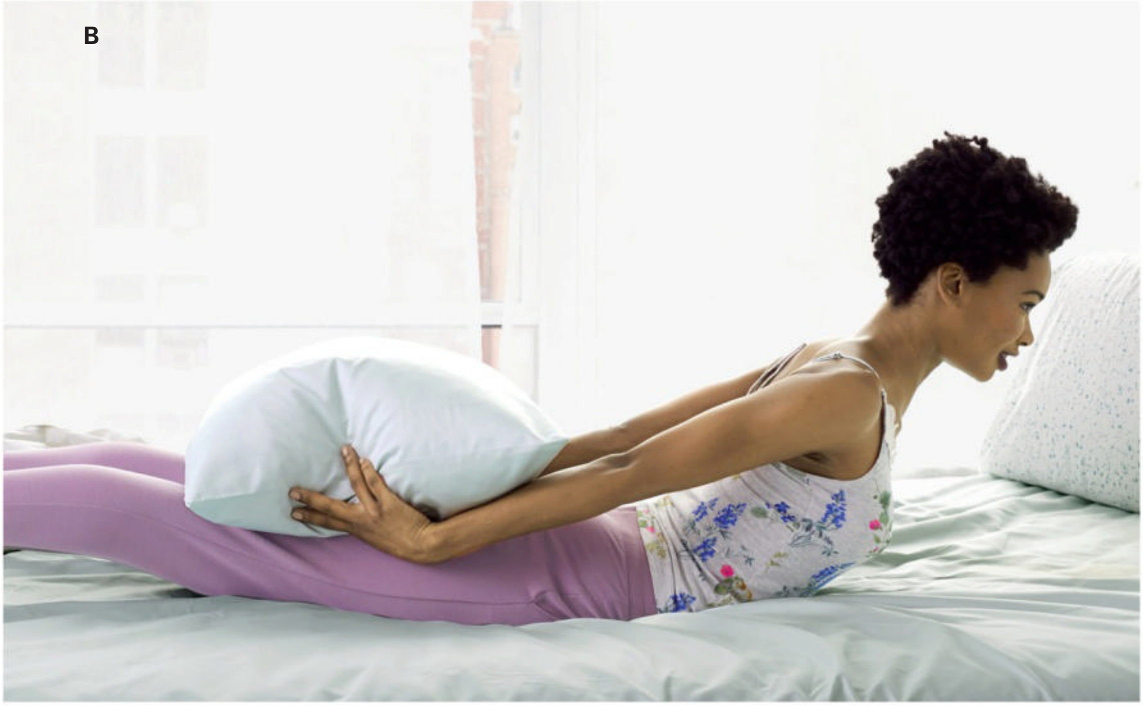
5

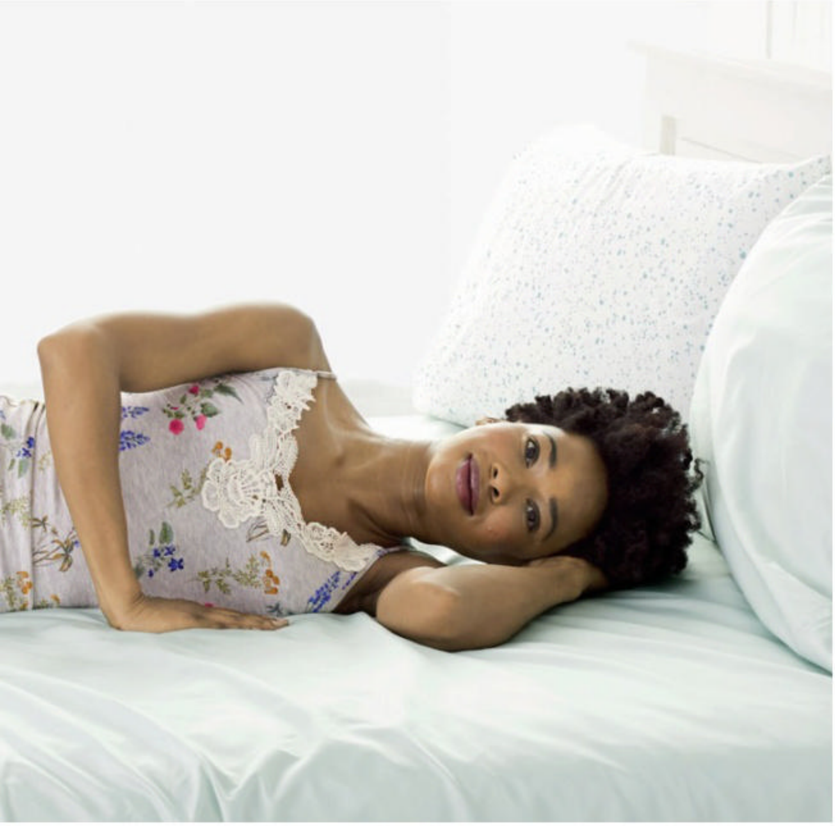
Simple Chest Lift

WORKS: Upper back, Triceps Lie on your stomach, holding a pillow behind you, as shown. Lift your chest and head while pressing down with your legs. Hold for 1 breath, then lower your head to the mattress, returning to the starting position. That's 1 rep; repeat for a total of 10. "By holding the pillow, you activate not only the back muscles, but also the triceps and shoulder muscles," says Bloom.

> **"A small group of muscles deep in the hip support posture and also lift the butt."**

B





6

The Clam

WORKS: Glutes, Hips, Thighs "This move targets a really small group of muscles deep in the hip that support posture and also lift and narrow the butt," says Bloom. Lie on your left side with your left arm tucked behind your head and your right hand on the mattress. Your legs should be bent at a 45-degree angle. Keeping your feet together, lift your right knee as high as you can without letting your hips move, then lower back down. That's 1 rep; do a total of 15 reps, then repeat on your right side.

ROLL WITH IT

Working, exercising, living—they can all leave your body achy and tight. Each of these moves start with digging into a muscle with a foam roller or ball, then stretching it. It's a powerful, healing combo.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:
Yoga strap or bath towel • Yoga block or hardcover book • Hard ball (lacrosse, tennis, baseball) • 36″ foam roller • Mat (optional)

Hip Hugger

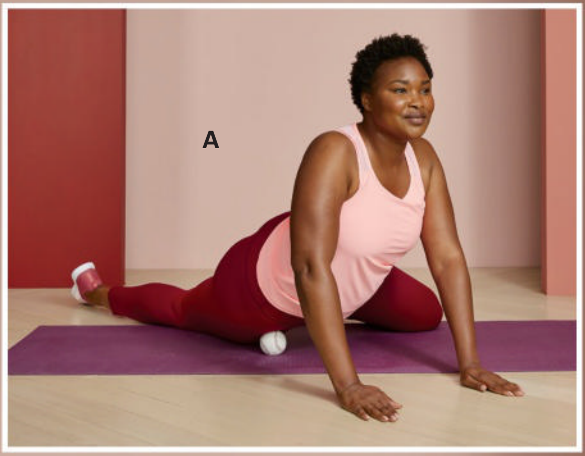
This exercise will release and open up your hip flexors and relieve pain in your hips and back.

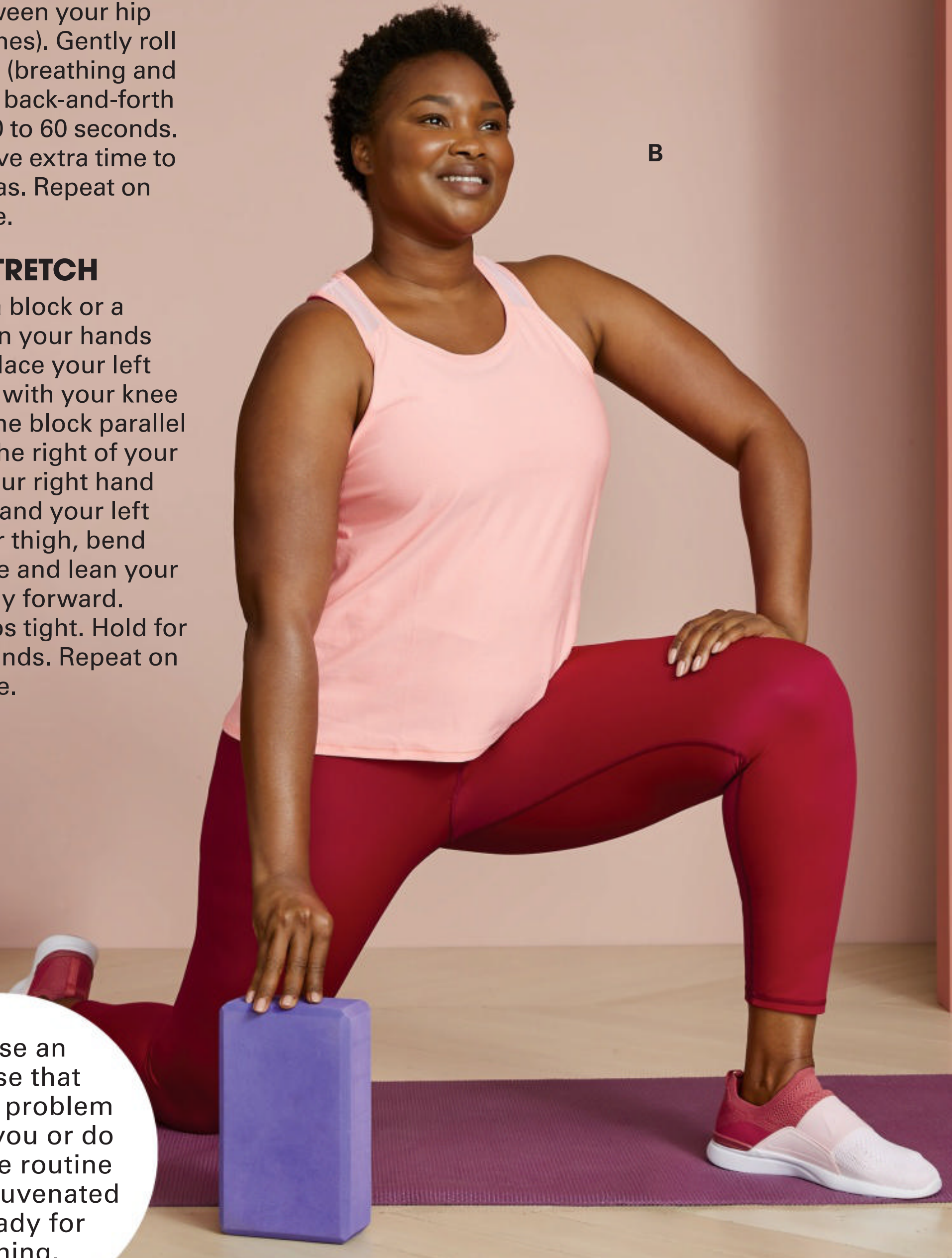
PART A | DIG

Using a ball and facing down, lay your body over the ball so the ball is directly under your hip flexors (located between your hip and thigh bones). Gently roll your hip area (breathing and relaxing) in a back-and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to sensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

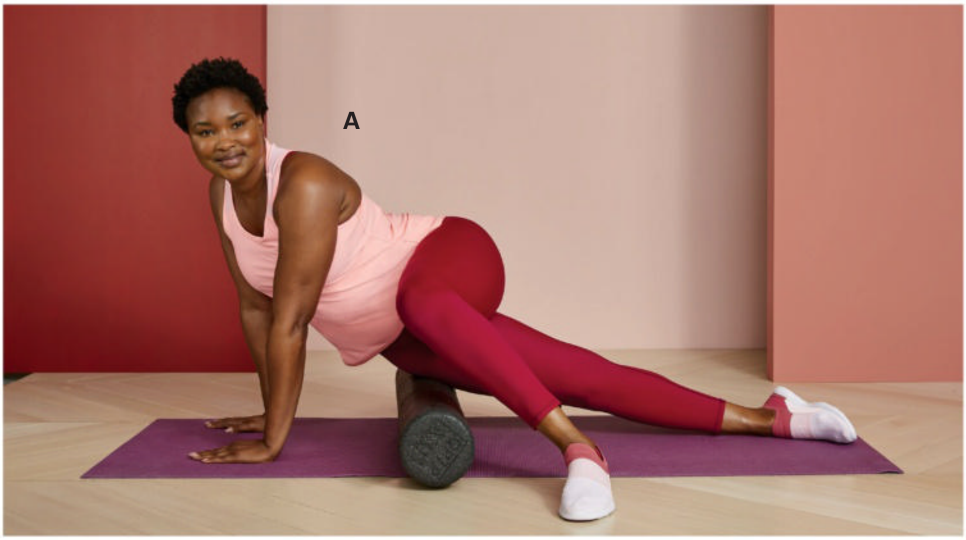
PART B | STRETCH

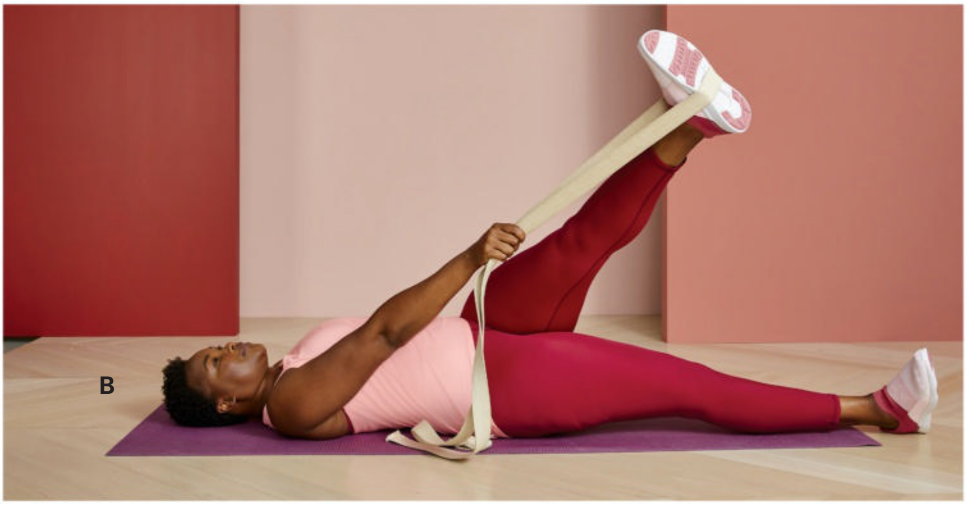
Using a yoga block or a book, start on your hands and knees. Place your left foot forward with your knee bent; place the block parallel with and to the right of your foot. With your right hand on the block and your left hand on your thigh, bend your left knee and lean your hips and body forward. Keep your abs tight. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.





Choose an exercise that targets a problem area for you or do the whole routine to feel rejuvenated and ready for anything.





Leg Loosener

Try this to open up your IT band (the ligament on the side of your leg) and relieve pain in your legs, hips, knees, and back.

PART A | DIG

Using a ball or a foam roller and lying on your right side, place the ball under your right hip and extend your right leg out straight. Cross your left leg over your right. Using your arms for leverage and support, roll the roller up and down your right leg, from your hip to your knee, for 30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to sensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

PART B | STRETCH

Using a yoga strap or a towel, extend your left leg up and place the middle of the strap over the arch of your left foot. Gather the straps in your right hand while extending your right leg on the floor and leaving your left arm at your side. Using the straps, pull your left leg (straightened) across to your right. Your abs should be tight. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

Glute Fixer

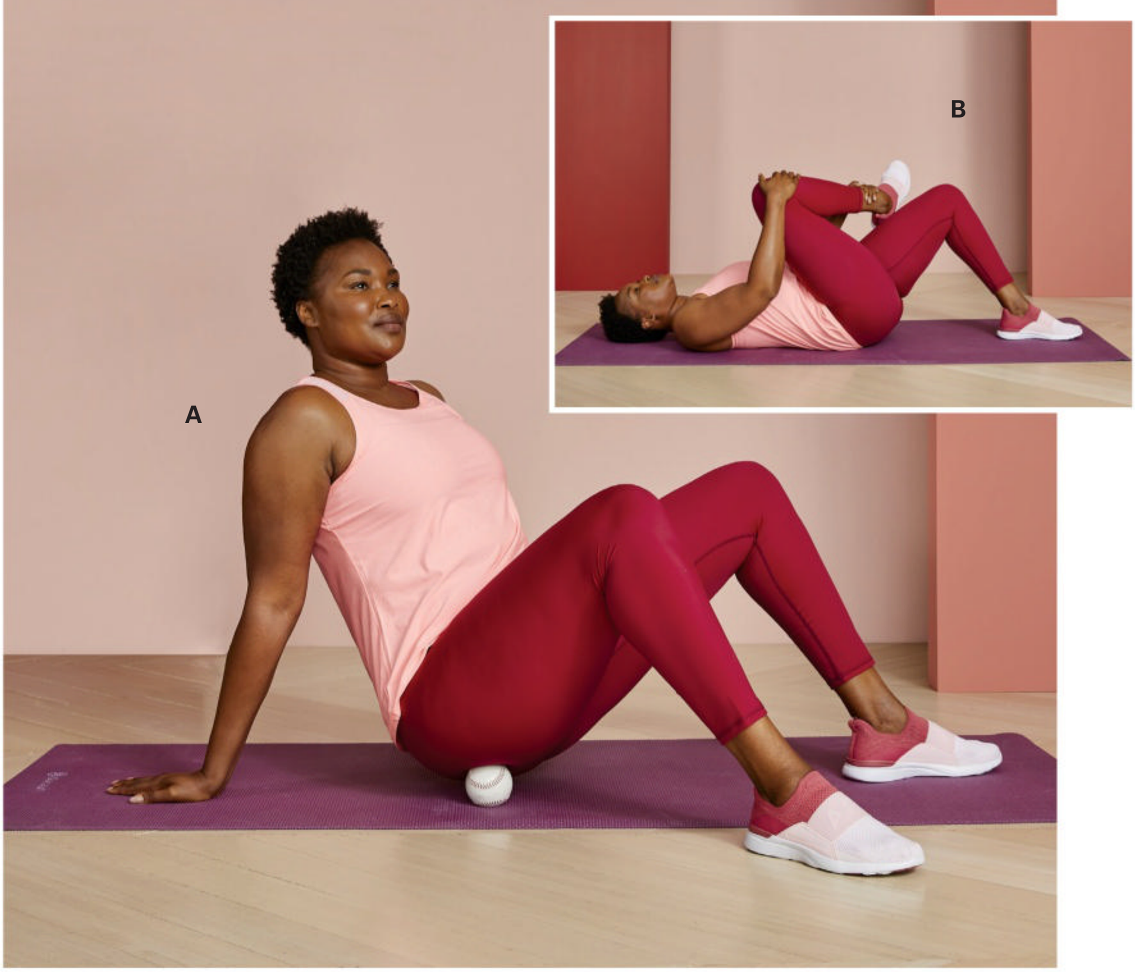
This move can release your piriformis muscle (deep in the buttocks) and relieve pain in your hips and back (sciatica).

PART A | DIG

Sit and place the middle of the right side of your butt over a ball. Gently roll that side in a back-and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe and relax as you go. Pause and give extra time to supersensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

PART B | STRETCH

Lie on your back and cross your right ankle over your left knee. Place your right hand on the outside of your right knee and your left hand on your ankle. Pull your knee to your chest. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side.



Posture Perfect

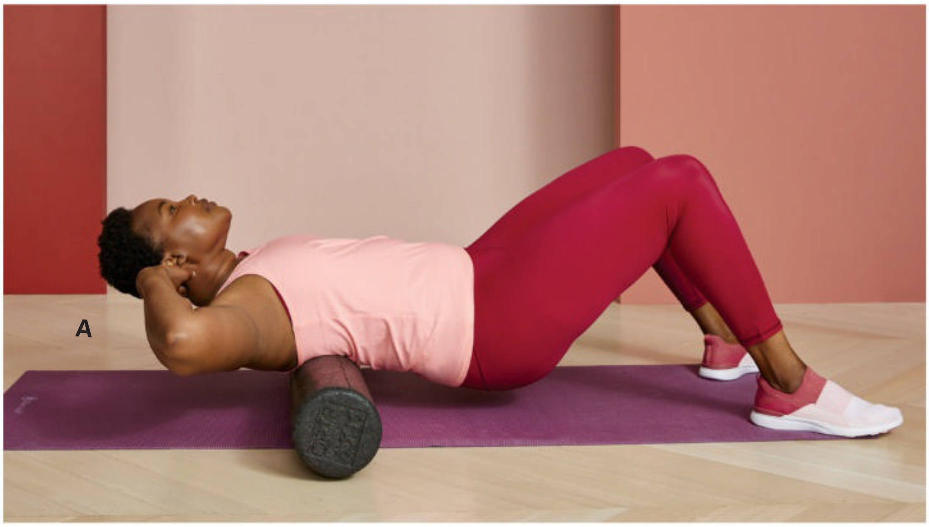
Try this exercise to release and open up your back, shoulders, and neck while improving posture and relieving pain.

PART A | DIG

Start seated on the floor, with a foam roller behind you. Gently lie back on the roller so the middle of your back is on the roller and your hips and feet (bend your knees) are on the floor. Place your hands behind your head (elbows out to the side), then lift your hips and roll your upper body gently back and forth over the roller for 30 to 60 seconds.

PART B | STRETCH

Lie on the foam roller with one end under your tailbone and the other end under your head (the roller should be against your spine). Place your arms out to the side with your palms up and your elbows bent at 90 degrees. Relax, breathe, and let your chest stretch and open. Hold for 5 minutes or more.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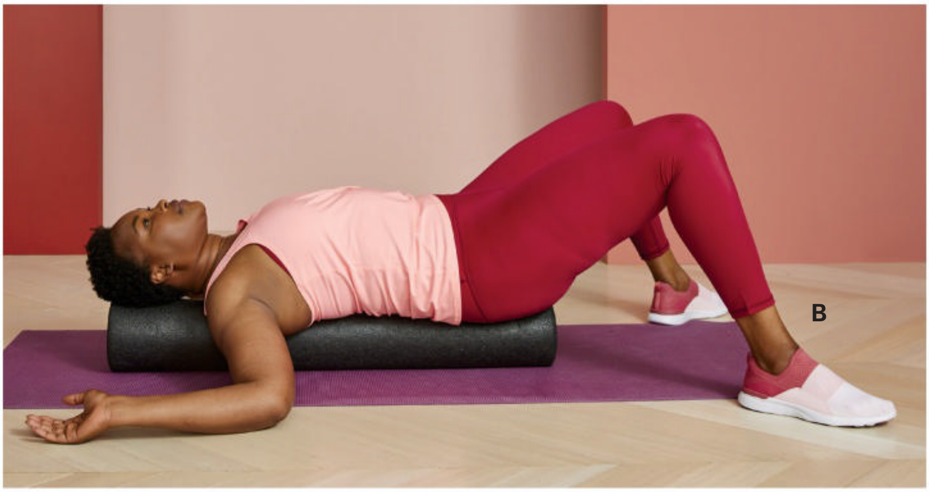
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Neck Adjuster

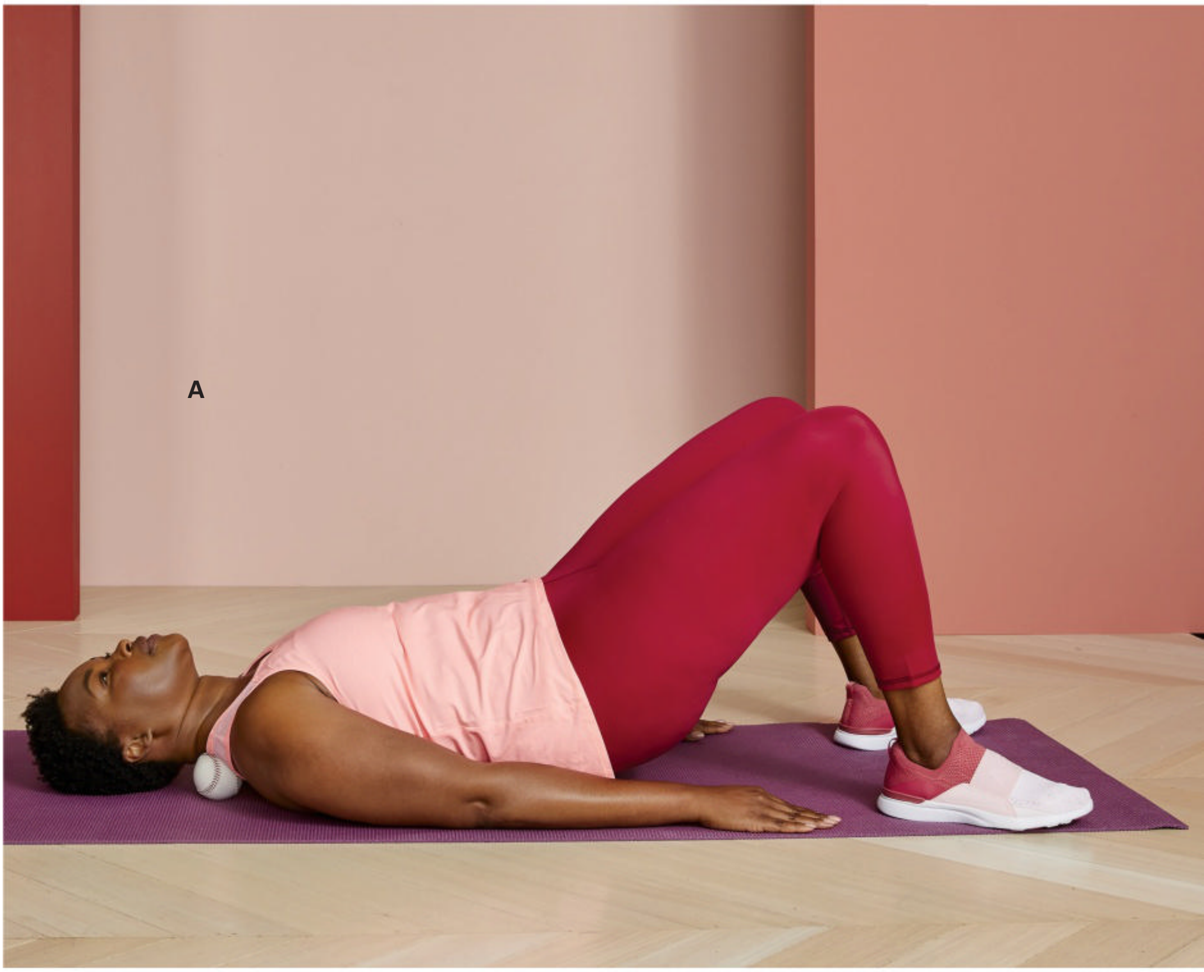
This pair of moves will open up your neck and upper back and relieve pain.

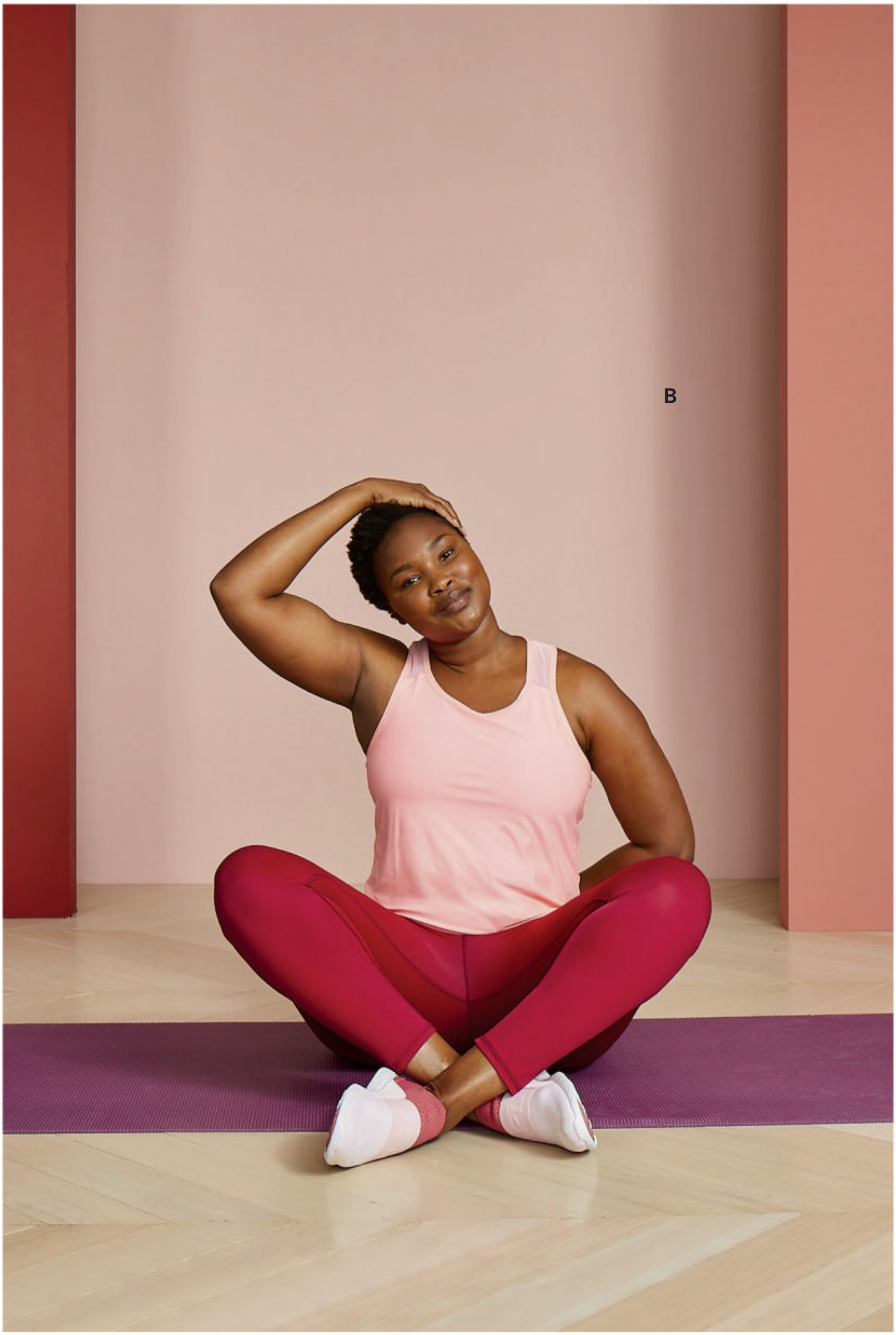
PART A | DIG

Using a ball, lie on your back with your knees bent. Lie on top of the ball so it's situated between your neck and upper shoulder blades (scapula). Raise your hips and push your body into the ball. Gently roll your upper back and lower neck area (breathing and relaxing) in a back-and-forth motion for 30 to 60 seconds. Pause and give extra time to sensitive areas. Repeat on the other side.

PART B | STRETCH

In a crisscross seated position, place your left arm (bent) behind your body. Place your right hand on your head. While pressing your left shoulder down, gently pull your head to your right shoulder. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

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Prevention
STRETCHING & FLEXIBILITY

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